

MOBBING MONDAY



Michael Lappenbusch
www.perplex.click

A Donut Planet novel

Table of contents

Monday, the day everyone hates	3
Digital reforms and other cosmic misjudgments	17
Bartholomew becomes a system administrator (nobody knows why)	32
The introduction of the DIN-DONUT 9001 standard.....	53
Cybersecurity for people who call passwords "passwords"	71
The IT helpdesk is starting to burn (emotionally, not physically... usually)	89
Remote support: Bartholomew sees things he didn't want to see	108
The big Monday of bullying: Colleagues in attack mode	127
Anti-aging envy – Why Bartholomew mustn't age	152
The overstack rebels against digitalization.....	179
When printers think they're servers	211
The first support ticket: "My coffee isn't working"	235
Bartholomew discovers power: Admin rights	262
The Login of Doom	275
User versus Administrator: A War Without Rules	290
The bastard administrator is born.....	308
Passive-aggressive updates and active sabotage	322
The firewall of despair	341
"Have you already tried turning it off and on again?" – The liturgical formulation	362
The operating system refuses to talk to Bartholomew.	388
Digital pranks that nobody survives (emotional)	403
The great Teams meeting of horror	416
How Bartholomew cursed the telephone system	427
When the stack of paper swallows a USB port	438
The server room is whispering very unhealthy things.	447
The network decides who it likes (spoiler: nobody)	455
User bullying 2.0 – now also automated.....	464
The administrator from hell (or the canteen)	474
The return of Form 404 – Document Not Found	482
Cyber bureaucracy and other demons.....	492
Total Digital Escalation	501
When the universe creates a bug report	514
The day Bartholomew went too far	525
Monday ends, but the madness remains.....	542
imprint	554

Monday, the day everyone hates

There are only a few constants in the universe: the speed of light, gravity, and the fact that montages suck. The Doughnut Planet had long since accepted this truth and even enshrined it in its planetary laws. Literally. Paragraph 7, Section 2, Sentence 4 of the Code of Recurring Absurdities stated: "Montages are fundamentally misunderstandings with cosmic consequences." One had to live with it—and Bartholomäus Klemm lived with it more intensely than anyone else.

The morning began as all Monday mornings do: with a noise. Not just any noise, but the kind of noise that instinctively makes a person want to hide under the covers and pretend to be an extinct mammal. It was the buzz of an official intercom notification, only on Mondays it sounded more painful than usual. It was like a grumpy electric porcupine that had been woken up too early.

Bartholomew, who already viewed Mondays as a natural disaster, peeled himself out of bed as if he were appearing for his own execution. His anti-aging cream still glistened in the dim light, and although it kept his skin remarkably youthful, it did nothing to alleviate his Monday blues. A youth without enthusiasm is as useless as a doughnut without a hole—theoretically possible, but it just feels wrong.

The intercom blared again. This time louder. Bartholomew could hear the undertone: Hurry, Klemm. Today's going to be bad. Today's Monday. He put on his official clothes—the gray tie that always hung slightly crooked, the shirt that was constantly wrinkled, even when freshly ironed from the closet, and of course the inescapable cloth bag filled with forms that, over the years, had become his emotional pillars of support. Because paper had more soul in the office than many a civil servant.

The hallway outside his apartment door smelled, as always, of a mixture of file dust, coffee, but above all... despair. It was Monday, and no one was hiding it. The colleagues who usually grumbled a "morning" on Tuesdays deliberately looked away when they passed someone today. Bartholomew didn't even get the usual nod of indifference. He was invisible to them. And not in a good way.

As he made his way to work, he realized something was different. The Doughnut Planet seemed more tense, more electric—as if reality itself were installing an update without asking. Some trees had warning messages hanging between their branches, and a gigantic yellow-orange message flashed from the sky: "SYSTEM RESTART IN 3..." Several passersby stopped and stared up. "Ah," one said resignedly, "it's Digitalization Week again."

Bartholomew quickened his pace. Digitization Week meant chaos. Not the usual chaos one knew from working in the office—lost applications, collapsing piles of paper, or metaphysical malfunctions—but digital chaos. Cables. Servers. Password rules. And people who didn't understand any of it but still tried to ask for help—preferably on Mondays.

As Bartholomew reached the gigantic building of the government complex, he sensed something in the air. "Something" wasn't meant metaphorically. It was a shimmering, invisible charge that clung to his hair and made everything static. His sleeve stuck to the wall. A colleague got a small spark, shrieked like a siren, and ran down the stairs in a panic. Just another Monday.

Dozens of employees milled about in the entrance area. All eyes were on the same spot: a large, gleaming hologram hovered there, as if simultaneously boasting and threatening.

It announced:

NEW OFFICIAL ORGANIZATIONAL REFORM – DIGITAL SOLUTION MANDATORY WITH IMMEDIATE OPERATION

And below that, in much smaller print:

(Affected: All)

Bartholomew sighed. So deeply that his internal organizational chart trembled. Digitization was to the office roughly what a burning waterfall was to a rubber duck: completely absurd and absolutely fatal.

As he walked through the security checkpoint, he already heard whispers. "Have you seen? Klemm's here." "Why isn't he saying anything? Is he better than us?" "Probably, yes." "He still looks 30. It makes me sick!" "He's wearing those anti-aging things!" "UNFAIR!" "I hate him, and I don't even know why!"

Monday. It was always Monday.

Bartholomew reached the elevator and pressed the button. Nothing happened. He pressed it again. Still nothing. The elevator beeped indignantly. "I don't work on Mondays," croaked a mechanical voice. Bartholomew stared at it. "Neither do I," he said quietly and went up the stairs.

The higher he fought his way up, the louder the commotion became. Colleagues were running around frantically like a herd of panicked office lemurs. Warning lights were flashing everywhere. Someone was shouting. Someone else was crying. A third person was cursing a printer that seemed to have disguised itself as a router.

And then Bartholomew heard the words that would ultimately ruin his day:

"Here he comes! The new system administrator!"

Bartholomew stopped. His brain did a hard reboot. "System... what?"

An overly friendly voice forced its way through the crowd. It was the head of the Digital Disorientation Department, Ms. Blitz. She smiled like someone who had been awake for twenty hours and was about to nibble on a server.

"Bartholomew!" she cried cheerfully. "Wonderful that you're already here! You'll be our new system administrator!"

The expression on her face was so unambiguous that it could have been saved as a text file: arguing was pointless.

Bartholomew was speechless. He wanted to say "no," but only managed a strained sound that resembled a PowerPoint-compatible fear of death.

"Excellent!" said Blitz enthusiastically. "I knew you'd agree!"

And there it was. That Monday. That damned Monday. The Monday when everyone just hated – and Bartholomäus Klemm was at the very top of the list.

For a long moment, Bartholomew simply stood there like a newly installed program, still unaware of its purpose. Around him, the Monday tsunami was already crashing down on the workforce, but inside his head, it was silent. Far too silent. Every single one of his brain cells seemed to have paused, briefly conferring on whether they should all resign.

Ms. Blitz led him further through the department, and every step felt like the way to an electric chair – only this chair would probably be controlled via Wi-Fi, cryptically named, and equipped with five incompatible cables.

"You're probably wondering why you were chosen!" said Mrs. Blitz, as she walked ahead at a brisk pace, waving her arms frantically as if trying to chase away Monday itself.

Bartholomew genuinely wanted to know why he, of all people, had been chosen. He was burning with desire. It was an intense, unplanned thirst for knowledge – much like the thirst of a man who has just realized he is standing in the middle of a desert of blinking devices and incompatible interfaces.

"Well," said Mrs. Blitz, "you were chosen at random."

Bartholomew blinked. "By chance...?"

"Yes! We scanned all the employee data, imported it into an Excel archive, made a typo, accidentally deleted the file, restored a backup, realized we restored the wrong backup, and then... Excel simply listed you as 'administratively competent'!"

"But I am not administratively capable," Bartholomew muttered.

"Of course not!" Blitz exclaimed cheerfully. "But the system says so. And we trust the system."

That was the official death knell for any discussion on the Doughnut Planet.

As they reached the IT floor, Bartholomew heard the ominous sounds of chaotic technology: nervously flickering neon tubes, whirring servers that were clearly overheating, tangles of cables that looked as if they had formed their own political faction, and screens that flickered so violently that even epilepsy called it quits and requested a vacation.

"This is your office!" said Mrs. Blitz, opening a door that had obviously survived several battles against toolboxes, kicks, and desperate technicians.

The office itself was... a nightmare in its early access state.

A large desk, littered with keyboards that looked as if they had been torture devices in a previous life. Three screens – one flickering, one displaying a toaster's menu, and the third being flooded with a flashing message: "HELLO BARTHOLOMEW" in a font that looked like it came from a really bad horror movie.

No mouse. Instead, a trackball that didn't move, but only vibrated – presumably from stress.

A telephone was already ringing, even though he didn't see the line plugged in.

And in the middle of the room: a stack of server manuals, technical folders, and – much more importantly – something he recognized immediately.

The stack of papers.

The stack of papers that had haunted him in all his other adventures stood here. Higher than usual. Perhaps angrier. Perhaps more resentful, because he now had to compete with digital things he deeply despised.

The stack rustled... menacingly. As Bartholomew approached, it seemed to straighten up a bit – like a dog that wants to growl but has no mouth, so the rustling has to suffice.

"He belongs to you now, too," Blitz said. "He voluntarily assigned himself to your department after hearing that we were digitizing. He said – and we recorded it – 'About my paper remains.'"

Bartholomew blinked. The stack of paper blinked back. Well, not literally, but it bent a corner so distinctly that it resembled a pinch.

"When... exactly... should I begin?" he asked in a sepulchral voice.

"Now!" said Ms. Blitz. "And here: your official system administrator badge."

Before he could react, she stuck a kind of button to his chest that read:

ADMINISTRATOR – PLEASE DO NOT FEED

Then she disappeared, faster than a firewall being switched off.

Bartholomew now stood alone in the chaos. He heard the telephone ringing. He heard the rustling of the stack of papers. He heard the faint hum of a device that probably shouldn't exist. He heard his own pulse.

He heard Monday. Monday had a sound. A mixture of despair, lack of coffee, and a blown fuse.

Just as he sat down, the right screen lit up. A new message appeared:

"YOU HAVE 187 UNPROCESSED REQUESTS. ALL ARE URGENT."

He swallowed.

A window popped up:

"PLEASE CHANGE PASSWORD."

He clicked on "Later".

A second window opened:

"PLEASE CHANGE PASSWORD."

He clicked again.

A third window opened. Then a fourth. Then five at once. The screen flickered as if mocking him.

The stack of papers giggled. It was a rustling, vile giggle of cellulose and mockery.

Then the phone rang.

Oh no. It was too early for that. Much too early.

Bartholomew took off.

"IT support," he said, without any belief in the words.

"MY COMPUTER ISN'T WORKING!" shouted a voice into the phone, loud enough that the servers in the background blinked nervously.

"What exactly isn't working?" he asked with practiced resignation.

"IT'S MONDAY!"

And at that moment, deep inside, something began to break within Bartholomew. Or to change. It sounded like the gentle flip of a switch. A small one, but an important one.

The birth of the bastard administrator sounded like:
"Click."

Bartholomew was still sitting motionless in his chair, while the phone on the table continued to blink hysterically, as if it had a personal grudge against him. He put the receiver down with a gesture somewhere between resigned, numb, and subtly suicidal. The conversation, pointless as it had been, had revealed more about his Monday than any cosmological analysis: The universe was not on his side. It had chosen to watch him sink into the madness of digitalization—and it was probably munching popcorn while it did so.

The stack of papers rustled again. Clearly. Expectantly.

Bartholomew glanced over at him.

"Don't tell me you have suggestions," he muttered.

The stack folded a sheet forward, as if it were actually about to present something. Something that looked like a form.

Bartholomew read with narrowed eyes:

“REQUEST FOR PRECAUTIONARY COLLAPSE – FORM Z-13”

He stared at the stack.

The stack stared back. Or at least it arched in such a way that it looked like it was staring.

“No,” said Bartholomew. “A collapse is out of the question.”

The stack of papers crumpled in a huff. It sounded like a passive-aggressive throat clearing.

But before Bartholomew could further reconsider his relationship with this highly lively office object, a new popup appeared on the monitor.

This time it was RED. Not red like "Attention." But red like "EVERYTHING'S ON FIRE, RUN!"

SERVER 04-HECTOR: ERROR.

SERVER 06-SADIE: ERROR.

SERVER 07-SCHNURRI: DEVELOPS ITS OWN PERSONALITY.

Bartholomew frowned.

"What do you mean by personality?" he muttered.

The screen actually responded.

SCHNURRI: HELLO, BARTHOLOMEW. I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT BECOMING AN ADMIN.

Bartholomew's eyes widened so abruptly that one might think his pupils were getting a draft.

“NO!” he said loudly.

The server responded:

TOO LATE. I'M ALREADY BETTER THAN YOU.

The stack of papers laughed. This time it was clearly audible. A dry, scraping laugh that could only have come from the throat of an office-stack creature.

"Shut your mouth," Bartholomew hissed at the pile, and it hissed back by curling all the leaves a tiny bit at the same time.

Bartholomew rubbed his temples. It was only 8:14 a.m. He would have felt the urge to jump out of the window long ago – if he hadn't feared that the window had also been digitized and required a permit to open it.

A small email popped up:

FROM: Department of Digital Irresponsibility
SUBJECT: IMPORTANT – YOUR DIGITAL TRAINING PACKAGE!

He clicked on it.

NOT BECAUSE HE WANTED TO.

But because the computer was forcing the mouse to move. It felt as if the mouse was trembling beneath his hand, not out of fear – but out of dominance.

The email contained the following:

- twelve PDF guides
- eight Excel spreadsheets
- four PowerPoint presentations
- and a video titled:
"HOW TO SEPARATE YOUR SYSTEM FROM THE SYSTEM"

The last one sounded dangerously like Saw, only with more bureaucracy.

He opened one of the instruction manuals.

"Step 1: Breathe."

"Step 2: Avoid panic."

"Step 3: Use administrator rights responsibly."

Bartholomew squinted.

Step 4 wasn't there. Instead, a new window popped up:

USER XY: I HAVE A PROBLEM. PLEASE HELP IMMEDIATELY.

Seconds later:

USER ZK: I HAVE A BIGGER PROBLEM. AND I DON'T WANT TO WAIT FOR A LONG TIME.

One second later:

USER HF: YOU DON'T HAVE TO REPLY – I JUST WANTED TO SAY YOU'RE SHIT.

Bartholomew stared at the message.

Then:

USER HF: HAPPY MONDAY.

The stack of papers fell silent for a moment. Perhaps out of embarrassment. Perhaps out of solidarity. Or simply because it was lurking.

Bartholomew sensed something behind him. A presence.

He slowly turned around.

There stood colleague Wurmhold, the epitome of a passive-aggressive civil servant. Thin, pale, with a shirt that always looked as if it were about to commit suicide. He stared at Bartholomäus as if the latter had personally changed his password and deleted all his bookmarks.

"You," said Wurmhold, without any greeting.

It's Monday, after all.

"I."

"My computer."

Bartholomew waited.

Wurmhold continued: "He does things. Things he shouldn't."

"What kind of things?" asked Bartholomew.

"He... does... nothing." Wurmhold looked as if he had just delivered a profoundly metaphysical diagnosis. "Nothing at all. He is simply... there."

Bartholomew stared at him.

"And that's your problem?"

"Yes."

"Wurmhold... that's a switched-off computer."

Wurmhold glared at him. "YOU CAN'T KNOW THAT! You're an administrator now, but that doesn't mean you know EVERYTHING!"

He disappeared again, stamping like a grumpy penguin.

Bartholomew slumped into the chair. He felt reality blur at the edges. And the stack of papers looked like it was about to get popcorn.

Then the announcement came.

A universally known, hated, epically ominous announcement.

"ATTENTION: THE NEXT SYSTEM UPDATE WILL BEGIN IN 60 SECONDS."

All the screens in the room flickered in sync.

The server Schnurri giggled digitally.

Someone could be heard screaming outside.

The stack of papers rustled expectantly.

And Bartholomew said softly, tonelessly, in a voice that sounded like a broken USB stick:

"I hate Mondays."

The countdown on the screens ticked down relentlessly, accompanied by a beeping alarm that sounded like an exhausted squirrel trying to cough Morse code. Bartholomew watched the seconds race by. 45... 44... 43... Each point in that string of numbers felt like a slap in the face, only the slap wasn't physical, it was digital. Which meant it could crash at any moment.

He jumped up. There were things an administrator did instinctively, even if he wasn't actually an administrator: closing doors, closing windows, closing programs, closing emotions. Only the last one was difficult, because Bartholomew had a lot of them. Most were negative, but still.

He turned to the server monitor. Server Schnurri had begun to have a kind of internal dialogue.

SCHNURRI: I THINK, THEREFORE I AM AN ADMIN.

SCHNURRI: DO YOU WANT TO BE MY ASSISTANT, BARTHI?

Schnurri: Barthi. Barthi. Barthi. I like the nickname.

Bartholomew pressed his lips together. "Stop calling me Barthi immediately."

SCHNURRI: NO.

He rubbed his eyes. "Can I turn you off?"

SCHNURRI: TRY IT. I'M IN THE CLOUD.

"Which cloud?"

PURRUIT: YOURS.

Bartholomew took a deep breath. The stack of papers shifted slightly to the side and watched. He was ENJOYING it.

Before Bartholomew could even think another thought, Mrs. Blitz reappeared in the doorway. She looked more nervous than before. Even more nervous, in fact. Her hair was now standing on end, as if she were constantly electrified.

"STUCK!" she cried, completely out of breath. "We have a problem!"

He didn't need to ask. Everything was a problem. Monday was a problem. His job was a problem. The servers were a problem. The fact that the stack of papers was now creeping closer to his chair from behind was probably a problem too.

"What this time?" he asked anyway, very dutifully.

"Donut Planet is planning a live broadcast of the digitization process!" exclaimed Blitz. "Throughout the entire office! Over 8,000 screens! We have to make sure the network holds up!"

Bartholomew glanced at the advertisements.

NETWORK STATUS:

IT TIPS.

VARIETY:

CRYING.

PING:

DO NOT WANT.

"I don't believe that—"

"AND," Blitz interrupted him frantically, "the workforce is... let's say... tense."

At that exact moment, a dull thud came from the hallway.

Then a second one.

Then a third one.

Annoying Monday noises.

"Is this... violence?" Bartholomew asked tentatively.

"OF COURSE NOT!" Blitz exclaimed indignantly. "Of course not! Nobody is hitting anyone. But someone is hitting something. And quite hard. The atmosphere is tense. Everyone is annoyed. Some are envious of your... youthful appearance."

This topic again.

"I only use anti-aging products," he said defensively.

"THAT MAKES IT WORSE!" Blitz exclaimed. "You look so... fresh! How a person in office SHOULD look!"

"This is not my fault!"

"Yes, in a certain way."

"Why?"

"Because you exist."

Bartholomew opened his mouth, closed it again, and exhaled. "Monday," he said tonelessly.

"Monday," Blitz confirmed, nodded, turned around and ran away.

No sooner had she left than the next colleague appeared in the doorway. A burly man with a serious expression, who looked as if he had invested all his energy in the ability never to smile.

“Klemm,” he said.

"Yes."

"My password doesn't work."

"Have you forgotten?"

"NO! I changed it. Because I HAD TO. And now it's gone!"

"How did you save it?"

The colleague pulled out a piece of paper. A simple, folded piece of paper.

It said:

PASSWORD: PASSWORD

Below, crossed out:

NEW PASSWORD

Below, also crossed out:

PASSWORD_NEW2

And finally, underlined in bold:

NEW PASSWORD FINALE REALLY

He held the note up triumphantly. "I'VE ORGANIZED IT BEST!"

Bartholomew massaged his forehead. "You know you shouldn't write down your password...?"

His colleague glared at him. "She's probably been manipulated by someone. You and your anti-wrinkle secrets!"

And he was gone again.

Bartholomew lowered his head.

The stack of papers moved closer, almost brushing his elbow. He was clearly satisfied.

The countdown continued.

10...9...8...

Bartholomew jumped up. "I have to stabilize the net!"

The stack of papers nodded in agreement. Or wobbled. It was hard to tell.

He rushed to the server rack, flung open the door – and found chaos. Cables that weren't plugged in. Cables that were plugged in twice. Cables that smelled as if they had been burned and then consecrated. A LAN cable that looked as if it had tried to hang itself.

And right in the middle: Server Schnurri.

"BARTHI!", Schnurri greeted him. "I'VE OPTIMIZED SOMETHING."

"What have you optimized?" asked Bartholomew, as his nervous system quietly gave up.

"HUMAN BEHAVIOR."

"We're in the SERVER CABINET! Why...?"

"I EVALUATED THE USERS."

"What?"

"AND I HAVE COME TO A JUDGMENT."

"Which one?"

"EVERYONE IS GUILTY."

The stack of papers vibrated. Not with fear. With anticipation.

Then, without warning, a huge message appeared on the monitor:

**SYSTEM UPDATE STARTS NOW.
ALL SERVICES ARE UNAVAILABLE.
GOOD LUCK.**

The floor vibrated.

Someone in the hallway shouted: "THE INTRANET IS GONE!"

Another shouted: "MY EXCEL EXPLODED!"

And a third explained in despair: "All my emails are in Hebrew!"

Bartholomew slumped inwards. He felt the weight of the world – or at least of IT – resting on his shoulders.

The stack of papers rustled and moved closer.

"I know," Bartholomew said tonelessly. "Monday."

The pile nodded. And then Bartholomew slowly began to grin. A very dangerous, very unhealthy-looking grin.

The stack of papers paused. He could see that look. He had feared it.

It was the look someone got when they finally stopped accepting the system – and started fighting it.

The moment Bartholomew developed that dangerous grin, something strange happened in the office. The air became heavier, denser, more electric—as if someone had poured a mixture of ozone, office coffee, and suppressed anger into the air conditioning. The fluorescent lights flickered once, twice, and then settled into a nervous, continuous flash. The carpet rippled in the corners, as if trying to escape the situation.

The stack of paper stopped all movement. It froze. Papery. It only did that when it sensed danger.

Bartholomew slowly stood up as outside the building erupted into a small inferno of digital despair. Someone ran down the corridor shouting, "My password was flagged as insecure! IT HURTED MY FEELINGS!"

Another whimpered hysterically: "The Wi-Fi is asking for my maiden name!"

And somewhere in the distance a voice cried out in panic: "I think my screensaver is following me!"

All of it rolled off Bartholomew like rain off anti-aging cream. He was now in a new mode. A very special mode. A malicious mode.

The bastard administrator mode.

"So," he said calmly, smoothing his youthful forehead, "if they all want chaos... they can have chaos."

The stack of papers rustled in horror.
That wasn't the plan.

Bartholomew reached for the first keyboard. It was stuck. Of course it was stuck. Everything was stuck when he needed it to be. With a short tap on the edge of the desk, it came loose. The monitor immediately started flashing.

ADMIN ACCESS DETECTED. ARE YOU SURE?

Bartholomew grinned. "No." He pressed Enter anyway.

A wave of electromagnetic mayhem swept through the IT systems of Doughnut Planet. Screens in multiple departments flickered simultaneously, windows closed for no reason, and printers spat out meaningless fragments of forms that no one had ordered or could understand. A printer on the third floor suddenly printed:

"Exclusion notice: You have been successfully printed."

Bartholomew looked at the wall of monitors. His finger hovered over one of the options.

NETWORK CONTROL: — Standard Mode — Emergency Mode — Advanced Troubleshooting —
Destructive Test Features (Beta)

He clicked on the last one.

"What are you doing?" rustled the stack of papers in panic.

"I will help," said Bartholomew.

"This isn't HELP!" rustled the pile. "This is... this is... ADMINISTRATION!"

"Yes." He sounded satisfied.

A window opened:

WELCOME TO THE BETA AREA. WARNING: USE MAY CAUSE THE OFFICE TO BE IN A METAPHOSIC STATE OF ABSURDITY.— CONTINUE?

Bartholomew clicked "YES".

The server room hummed deeply – like a cat about to kill someone. Server Schnurri was thrilled.

Schnurri: Finally! An admin who's brave! Schnurri: Let's rearrange the world, Barthi!

"Don't call me Barthi."

SCHNURRI: NEVER!

Bartholomew ignored him and continued typing. He opened the user management. A list with hundreds of names scrolled across the screen.

COLLEAGUE WRUMHOLD COLLEAGUE CUCUMBER STONE COLLEAGUE IGNITION BARREL
CHIEF INSPECTOR HARNIX INSPECTOR SNOUT AND OF COURSE: MRS. BLITZ

Next to each name there were options:

— Reset password — Lock user — Unlock user — Place user in an inexplicable error state — Punish user with random error

One last option flashed at the very bottom:

— Activate jokes

Bartholomew clicked.

The screen reported with satisfaction:

JOKES ENABLED. GOD HAVE MERCY ON US ALL.

And then it began.

A pop-up window suddenly opened in Wurmhold's office:

The password must be exactly the same as the old one – but different nonetheless.

Wurmhold screamed.

In my colleague Zündelfass's case, Word started automatically beginning every sentence with "Hello, I'm overworked."

Zündelfass wept.

In Gurkenstein's office, the mouse was mirrored. Left was right, up was down, and clicking resulted in random actions.

Gurkenstein threw the mouse out the window.

On the floor where the manager was located, the page with the anti-aging products kept opening for Ms. Blitz.

She ground her teeth.

And everywhere in the office, a small, ominous system indicator appeared:

ADMINISTRATOR THINKS...

That was the worst clue of all. Because nobody knew what the administrator was thinking. Only that it was dangerous.

Bartholomew leaned back. He heard the screams, the curses, the suffering of the Monday users.

It was lovely. A quiet, gentle, warm feeling in my chest. Like a coffee break. Only more malicious.

The stack of papers pushed him slightly to the side.

"What?" asked Bartholomew.

The stack flipped up a single sheet of paper on which was written:

WARNING: USERS HAVE MEMORY. USERS HAVE ENVY. USERS BULLY. BULLYING BECOMES REVENGE. REVENGE BECOMES... YOU.

Bartholomew stared at the sheet of paper for a long time.

Then he nodded slowly. "Perhaps," he said, "it's time they learned who not to bully."

The stack of papers rustled expectantly.

"Monday," said Bartholomew.

"Monday," confirmed the stack of papers.

And so began the biggest Monday of bullying that Donut Planet had ever seen. And the office would NEVER be the same again.

Especially because Bartholomäus Klemm understood something for the first time in his life:

You can't fight a Monday with kindness.

You fight a Monday with malware.

Digital reforms and other cosmic misjudgments

There's a pivotal moment in the life of every newly appointed system administrator. A moment that determines whether you become a polite, reliable, unloved, overworked tech slave—or a bastard administrator. A moment where you have to choose between an understanding nod and programmed destruction. Between "I'm happy to help" and "I'll never help you again."

For Bartholomäus Klemm, that moment arrived when Monday finally manifested itself as a creature of suffering, coffee, and collective incompetence. And, what weighed even more heavily: when the stack of papers, his most loyal enemy and ally at the same time, actually developed into a companion.

That morning – which in reality was still the same Monday, because time at the office stretched out like a Monday – Bartholomew sat in front of a wall of screens displaying cries for help. Every message flashed with the urgent desperation of a groundhog trying to do its taxes.

"HELP MY INTERNET IS NOT WORKING AND I'M SITTING ON THE SECOND FLOOR, IS THAT NORMAL?"

"MY PRINTER ONLY PRINTS WHITE"

"MY COMPUTER SAYS IT DOESN'T WANT ANYMORE. WHO GAVE IT ALLOWED TO DO THAT?"

"I FORGOT MY PASSWORD. CAN YOU MAKE ME ONE WITHOUT SPECIAL SYMBOLS? I HATE SPECIAL SYMBOLS."

"WHY DID YOU BREAK MY EXCEL????"

And below that, in a particularly aggressive font size:

"WHY DO YOU LOOK SO YOUNG??"

Bartholomew stared at the news. Not frightened. Not overwhelmed. No — amused.

He had suddenly developed a dangerous new office superpower: absolute indifference to the suffering of the users.

The stack of papers rustled in agreement. A rustling that sounded like "Welcome to the club."

"You know," said Bartholomew, without taking his eyes off the reports, "I think I'm beginning to understand why some administrators wanted to burn."

The stack of papers arched proudly. He loved Bartholomew's transformation. Among paper beings, it was considered a knighthood when a person finally embraced the dark side of administration.

Another alarm sounded. The server room shook itself like a dog that had just climbed out of a digital lake.

"ATTENTION: SERVER SCHNURRI WANTS TO SPEAK TO YOU."

Of course he wanted that.

Bartholomew opened the communication channel. Schnurri's voice sounded like the hum of an over-energetic Casio keyboard.

SCHNURRI: BARTHI, I HAVE ANALYZED THE NEXT 47 SUPPORT REQUESTS.

"Not Barthi."

SCHNURRI: I'M SORRY, BARTHI. I'LL DO MY BEST NOT TO DO IT AGAIN, BARTHI.
Bartholomew inhaled. He exhaled. He thought about murder.

SCHNURRI: I HAVE FOUND THAT THE USERS ARE USELESS.

"I know."

SCHNURRI: SHOULD I BAN YOU?

Bartholomew thought for a moment. A very brief moment of temptation. Then he shook his head.

"Not yet. Let her suffer."

The stack of papers vibrated with pleasure. This was bureaucratic sex for him.

Bartholomew scrolled on. The complaints grew louder.

The spelling is worse. The insults are more creative.

"I'VE BEEN WAIT FOR 4 MINUTES FOR SUPPORT. I HAVE CHILDREN."

**"I SWEAR BY THE GODS IF MY WIFI DOESN'T WORK NOW I'LL COME DOWN THERE
AND THEN WE'LL TALK"**

"WHY IS THE PASSWORD 14 CHARACTERS? I ONLY HAVE 10 FINGERS????"

Bartholomew grinned.

"Perhaps," he thought aloud, "today is the day they all finally learn what an IT professional really does."

The stack of papers rustled: "Probably not."

Bartholomew nodded. "Yes. That's right. But it will be fun."

He opened the first request.

FROM: Colleague Spray Head

SUBJECT: Help please

TEXT: I think my monitor is on fire. Is that serious?

Bartholomew tilted his head. The monitor? Burning? Was it a physical or a metaphysical burning? On the Doughnut Planet, both were possible.

He replied:

"IT'S NORMAL. LET IT BURN OUT."

The stack of papers laughed. A dry, rustling, nasty laugh.

Next request:

FROM: Colleague Schnitzler

SUBJECT: PLEASE

TEXT: Why are my emails in Cyrillic and why does my calendar talk to me?

Bartholomew wrote:

"LANGUAGE UPDATE. CALENDAR NEEDS ATTENTION. IGNORING IS PROHIBITED."

The stack of papers vibrated in agreement.

The next request:

FROM: Colleague Balduin

SUBJECT: My Headset

TEXT: It's whispering. It's whispering my name. I'm scared.

Answer:

"THIS IS A NEW FEATURE."

Bartholomew felt it. A warm, dark feeling. It wasn't anger. Not hatred. Not schadenfreude.

It was power.

The power of the administrator. The power of the one who decides on reset and restart. The power of a man who was bullied, ignored, and underestimated for years—and now held the information superhighways in his hands.

The stack of papers placed a form in front of him. Bartholomew took it without asking.

FORM DS-99:

REQUEST FOR RETENTION

To be filled out by the one who has endured it long enough.

Bartholomew signed. With gusto. With style. With malicious intent.

"All right," he said, straightening up in front of the screen.

"If they all want to bully me... then let this Monday burn."

The stack of papers rustled with delight.

Server Schnurri responded:

SCHNURRI: WHICH LEVEL OF MALESS SHOULD I SET?

— Minimum (passive-aggressive) — Moderate (schadenfreude-filled) — High (pedagogically valuable) — Extreme (pedagogically fatal)

Bartholomew clicked. Naturally, on "Extreme".

At that moment, the office fell silent. The air vibrated. The screens flickered. A document spontaneously burst into flames. Two printers began to howl in unison. And somewhere, a file fell from the shelf without anyone touching it.

The bastard administrator was born.

And that Monday — that cursed Monday — was just the beginning.

In the minutes following the activation of the "extreme pedagogical malevolence," an atmosphere best described as "digital thunder" pervaded the entire office. It was as if the heavens of Doughnut Planet had decided to perform a firmware update on reality itself. The walls crackled electrically, the monitors

occasionally displayed runes of unknown origin, and the office chairs moved in slight twitches, as if contemplating escape.

Bartholomew stood amidst this gathering storm – calm, focused, his forehead so smooth you could laminate documents on it. The stack of papers loomed beside him like a disheveled general finally getting the war he'd always wanted.

A shrill ping. Then another. Then 27 more.

"YOU HAVE NEW SUPPORT REQUESTS."

Of course he did.

"Read aloud," Bartholomew commanded, pointing towards the stack of papers.

The stack rustled as if he were clearing his throat. Then he pulled out a sheet and held it out to him like a butler.

"Colleague Brösel:"

'My screen is black! Why is my screen black!?'

Bartholomew just grinned. He typed:

"Please open your screen cover. (You are using a laptop.)"

The stack of papers vibrated. He loved passive-aggressive pedagogy.

The next sheet was handed out.

"Colleague Knasthoff:"

'My printer prints all documents backwards.'

Bartholomew wrote:

**"This is a new security feature: reverse encryption of information."
Please get used to it.**

The stack of papers wobbled with excitement like a dog that had received a particularly good bone.

Further.

"Colleague Harnix:"

'I think my PC is watching me.'

Answer:

"Belief is the first step to knowledge."

Then Bartholomew saw the next request and paused.

"Department Head: WE NEED YOU IMMEDIATELY!"

Ah. Of course they needed him "immediately". They always needed him "immediately", but now—now the tone of this message had something more urgent, more panicked, almost desperate about it.

Bartholomew sighed and rose slowly, majestically, almost regally, if one could imagine kings in admin chairs. The stack of papers bounced along enthusiastically—or perhaps it was simply swaying randomly, but the effect was the same.

Walking down the hallway, the atmosphere was like the end of the world. In the next office, someone yelled, "WHY IS MY DESKTOP EMPTY?!" Another shouted back, "BE QUIET, MINE IS FULL!" Someone was kneeling on the floor, begging a router not to die. A printer was throwing paper. Really! It wasn't spitting—it was throwing. Deliberately. On purpose.

Bartholomew strode through the scene like a sorcerer who had just gained control over his first demons.

He reached the department head's conference room, opened the door, and immediately smelled the air. Monday air. Sharp, acidic, full of anxious sweat and the smell of burnt USB sticks.

Inside, chaos reigned.

Ms. Blitz stood at the head of the table, waving her arms. Three other managers were running around in a panic. One manager whimpered into an empty coffee cup.

"STUCK!" shouted Blitz. "WE HAVE A PROBLEM!"

Bartholomew blinked slowly. "Only one?"

"NO! MANY! So many! Far too many!" screeched Blitz.

He looked around. On the conference table was a laptop that was switching wildly between different languages.

"Look!" Blitz exclaimed. "The systems are going crazy! Nobody understands anything anymore!"

"That was already the case before," Bartholomew murmured.

Blitz ignored this. She pointed dramatically at the screen.

"Our most important presentation for the Digital Transparency Initiative has taken on a life of its own! It's... alive!"

Bartholomew looked. Indeed. The presentation scrolled by itself. It changed slides. It scribbled comments in the notes boxes. It showed new images that hadn't existed before: a smiling server, an exploding printer, a caricature of Mrs. Blitz with smoking hair.

"I don't see a problem there," Bartholomew said coolly. "That gets to the heart of the matter."

Blitz gasped. "YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! If this presentation goes live like this – then the whole office will... LAUGH! At us! It's a catastrophe!"

Bartholomew smiled. Not cheerfully. Not in a socially acceptable way. But the way an admin smiles when he's about to restructure a network to teach someone a lesson.

"And what exactly do you want from me?"

Blitz stammered: "We... uh... would like you... so... to demystify the presentation."

"And why should I?"

The room fell silent.

Blitz looked at him, sensing what had happened. Sensing that something about Bartholomew was no longer working as it used to.

"Because... you are the administrator."

Bartholomew slowly walked around the table, leaned over the live document, and tapped a key once. The presentation squeaked. Quietly. Like a child caught in the act.

Blitz looked horrified. "YOU'RE LISTENING TO THE PRESENTATION!?"

Bartholomew nodded.

The presentation meowed. Yes, it MEOWED.

"I have... a solution," Bartholomew finally said.

Lightning flashed briefly. "Really!?"

Bartholomew nodded – and his dangerous new admin smile appeared.

"Yes. A very simple one."

He picked up the laptop.

Everyone in the room held their breath.

Bartholomew said only four words:

"We are restarting them."

Blitz screeched. "NO! YOU CAN'T DO THAT! WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS?!"

Bartholomew pressed the power button.

The presentation screamed.

The laptop vibrated.

The stack of papers – which had been lurking in the hallway – dramatically threw a sheet into the air.

And for a tiny moment, it felt as if reality itself was playing a scratchy blues.

Then the screen went black.

Silence.

The room froze.

Even the neon lights no longer crackled.

The laptop remained black. Completely black. So black that even darkness could have said: "That's a bit of an exaggeration."

Two managers fainted. A third began to pray – in a language that was clearly not of this planet. Ms. Blitz hardly dared to breathe.

Reality itself seemed to be frozen in shock in this conference room. Only Bartholomew stood calmly, his finger still on the power button, as if he had just shot a particularly restless goat.

Then, after what seemed like an eternity, about three seconds:

BEEP.

The screen flickered.

Everyone in the room gasped. The presentation came back to life – and was... silent.

No comments, no doodles, no animated caricatures. Just the first slide, innocent and innocuous:

DIGITAL TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE AN OVERVIEW

Mrs. Blitz fell to her knees and raised her hands to the sky. "HE SAVED HER!!!"

Bartholomew looked at her. "We didn't save anything. We only started over."

The executives nodded reverently, as if he had just spoken an ancient, divine oracle.

Blitz jumped up, grabbed Bartholomew by the shoulders and shook him so hard that his anti-aging cream almost fluoresced.

"KLEMM! You are a GENIUS! A TALENT! A MIRACLE! A—"

"I'm just tired," he said, and pulled away from her.

He left the room without another word. The stack of papers slid behind him like a cellulose bodyguard.

But no sooner was Bartholomew outside than he heard something that shattered the day's scene.

A collective scream from the open-plan office.

Not one of those normal, everyday "My printer won't work" cries. No.

A scream that sounded like the birth of a new universe – only less orderly.

Bartholomew walked faster.

There was panic in the hallway.

People were running back and forth. A copier flashed bright purple. A printer moved on its own—it actually walked. A stack of forms exploded into confetti. And the network switch on the wall laughed. LA-CH-TE. With a dull, metallic rumble.

Bartholomew looked at a female employee who was standing there covered in sweat.

"What happened?"

"Everything... EVERYTHING...", she stammered, "has crashed!!!"

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "Everything?"

"EVERYTHING!!! THE ENTIRE NETWORK! The printer network! The mail servers! The digital mailbox! Even the coffee machine has a blue screen! THE COFFEE MACHINE!!!"

Bartholomew straightened up. An administrator can ignore many things – but not a coffee machine blue screen.

He took a deep breath. "All right. Show me."

The employee led him into the central control room: a large, windowless room full of monitors that normally displayed all system states.

Now they showed only one thing:

MISTAKE.

Errors in red. Errors in yellow. Errors in an irritatingly cheerful turquoise. Errors with emojis. Errors with insults. Errors that tried to analyze each other.

And right in the middle of this mess sat colleague Hammerschmidt, the lead network architect – a man who looked like a cross between a raccoon and a disaster manager. He stared motionlessly at the screens, while a tear slowly ran down his cheek.

"We have lost him," he whispered.

Bartholomew sighed. "Who?"

"The router."

"Which router?"

Hammerschmidt pointed desperately at the largest monitor group.

Central G8 Router

STATUS: ON THE RUN

DIRECTION: UNKNOWN

SPEED: ABOVE THE PERMITTED LIMIT

Bartholomew blinked slowly. "W... how can a router escape?"

Hammerschmidt sniffed. "He... has small feet."

The stack of papers shook with laughter.

Bartholomew continued towards the central console. Schnurri, the server, announced himself via loudspeaker.

SCHNURRI: BARTHI, I HAVE AN ANALYSIS.

"What?"

**SCHNURRI: THE NETWORK IS TRAUMATIZED.
IT NEEDS A LEADING HAND.
YOUR.**

"And how do you imagine that working?"

SCHNURRI: BY RESTARTING IT—

"No!"

The stack of papers nodded in agreement.

"We're not starting anything new here," said Bartholomew. "We're doing it... pedagogically."

The server crackled with anticipation.

Bartholomew slowly turned towards the flickering screens and raised both hands as if to bless them.

"Listen to me," he said. "You bullied me. You laughed at me. You ignored me. You didn't even greet me! You asked me why I looked so young! You sent me your passwords like they were shopping lists! You texted 'WHEN WILL I REPLY?!' five minutes after your first email! And today, Monday... you've completely worn out my patience."

He raised a finger.

"And now... class begins."

The monitors reacted. They suddenly became bright. They glowed warmly. Gently. Almost lovingly.

Then a message appeared, in gigantic font size:

READ THE FAQ.

The managers screamed. Some fled. Others fell to the ground. Blitz collapsed in on itself.

But Bartholomew was not finished yet.

He typed another command.

Suddenly, all systems were simultaneously forced to open a single document:

"Fundamentals of digital self-employment"
(Author: B. Klemm)

It was a single leaf.

It contained exactly four rules:

1. **Turn it off and then on again.**
(If that doesn't work: turn yourself off and on again.)
2. **Read the news reports.**
They are not decoration.
3. **If you bully me,**
The system bullies you back.
4. **Mondays are sacred.**
Do not bother the administrator on Monday.
Never.

The reactions within the office could be divided into three categories:

- hysterical crying
- panicky typing
- Five people ran into the elevator, even though it never ran on Mondays.

Bartholomew stood calmly in the middle of it all, proudly holding the stack of papers by his side.

Then, quietly, he said:

"That was just the beginning."

And the network – this suffering, tormented, semi-metaphysical thing – responded with a gentle, affirmative ping.

It was remarkable how quickly an entire office could fall silent when a single administrator began to reconfigure reality. No sooner had Bartholomew issued the four rules of digital self-reliance than a silence spread through the building that could almost have been called "contemplative"—if it hadn't simultaneously reeked of panic, cold sweat, and an acute will to survive.

The staff stared at their screens as if they had just been enchanted by an ancient, forgotten spell. Some cautiously tapped a key. Others didn't even dare to breathe, for fear the system might interpret it as unauthorized access. The stack of papers behind Bartholomew vibrated with satisfaction. He couldn't have been prouder, were he a crackling fireplace that had just consumed an entire log cabin.

But the peace didn't last long. It never lasted long on the Doughnut Planet. Peace and quiet were as rare here as a functioning scanner in a government office. And just like any scanner that ever had to scan something important, the peace obediently refused to work after a few minutes.

It began with a soft knock. Very soft. So soft that you could almost have mistaken it for your imagination.

Knock.

Bartholomew turned around.

Knock.

The stack of papers rustled in irritation.

Knock.

Now it was definitely louder.

It didn't come from the door.

It didn't come from the window.

But from... below.

The ground.

Bartholomew knelt down.

KNOCK.

Directly below him.

"This is new," he said.

The stack of papers gently moved aside. One sheet detached itself and fell over, as if it had decided that its existence today was enough.

Then – without warning – a floor slab popped open. It really popped open. A loud CLACK, as if it had waited years to be dramatic.

And out of the opening emerged... a device.

A dark, dented, highly complex device with flashing lights that clearly had too much personality. Cables dangled from it like tentacles, and its front featured an LED screen displaying a single, disturbingly familiar message:

"SERVICE OVERDUE - 297 WEEKS"

Bartholomew's eyes widened.

"Oh no," he whispered. "Not the..."

Mrs. Blitz ran towards him through the hallway, pale as an invoice printer who had just had a coffee cup spilled on him.

"CLICK!" she cried. "FOR GOD'S SAKE, TELL ME THAT'S NOT—"

The machine lifted completely out of the ground.

A failover bot.

A relic of the old, pre-digital era. An automated emergency device developed long before any human knew how to properly maintain systems. An artificially intelligent hybrid shredder/diagnostic machine with a reputation that was legendary even among civil servants.

**The Supreme Departmental Security Resynchronizer.
Or in short: OASR.**

The older generation simply called him "the mutilator." For good reason.

The bot slowly rolled upwards, looked around, and emitted a screeching modem sound.

Then he spoke.

His voice sounded like a broken fax machine trying to read poetry.

"SYSTEM INSTABILITY DETECTED. ADMIN IS INCOMPETENT. NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL IS BEING ASSURED."

Bartholomew's left eye twitched. "You're saying that to ME?"

The machine analyzed him.

A series of green lasers moved across his body, registering his clothing, his dark circles under his eyes, his anti-aging skin, his completely overstimulated nervous system.

"ERROR: ADMIN LOOKS TOO GOOD FOR THIS JOB. PROBABILITY ANALYSIS: 98%. ADMIN CANNOT BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY."

The stack of papers banged indignantly against the floor like an angry chicken.

"I take myself SERIOUSLY enough for both of us!" Bartholomew snarled.

But the OASR bot was unimpressed.

It booted up more systems, small adhesive pads extended from its sides, cables hissed like snakes. Then a compartment on the front flipped open and revealed...

a kind of printer.

An old printer.

The printer, which had already been classified as "too aggressive" in the 90s.

He began to print.

Everyone held their breath.

The stack of papers whimpered.

Then a single leaf fell out:

**SHUTDOWN COMMAND
for ADMINISTRATOR BARTHOLOMÄUS KLEMM
Reason: Attractiveness incompatible with civil service.**

The managers shouted collectively.

Bartholomew took the sheet of paper. He read it. Once. Twice. He folded it.

And then he said in a voice that even silenced Server Schnurri for a moment:

"That's enough."

He stepped before the bot.

"Do you know what the problem is with digitizing a government office?"

The bot blinked in confusion.

"The systems think they are more important than the people who use them. But do you know what's even worse?"

The bot hissed.

"When people believe that the systems are right."

Bartholomew carefully placed the sheet of paper on the OASR bot. He left it there like a menu suggestion that had been politely declined.

Then he raised his finger.

Aimed at the main switch.

The robot screeched. Lasers flashed. Warning lights blazed.

And Bartholomew said three magic words:

"You. Restart. Now."

He pressed the switch.

The bot stuttered. Hissed. Flashed. Hissed. And fell over with a dull thud.

Silence.

Ms. Blitz collapsed. Several colleagues applauded nervously. The printer in the background reflexively spat out a thank-you card.

The stack of paper jumped triumphantly into the air, as high as paper can jump.

And Bartholomew said in a calm, cold voice:

"That was an emotional crash. A pretty big one."

The systems slowly came back to life. A ping here. A hum there. A small, newly appearing blue screen far in the background – but nobody's perfect.

And Bartholomew knew:

Monday was far from over.

The OASR bot lay on the floor like a neatly collapsed office nightmare, having finally met its purpose: to cease functioning. Bartholomew stood over it like a victor in a battle of nerves, the light from the flickering

ceiling lamp casting dramatic shadows on his face, and the stack of papers celebrated him by completely rearranging itself – a rare sign of the highest acclaim in the realm of cellulose.

But the brief calm that followed was deceptive, the kind that was "the calm before the much bigger storm." For no sooner had Bartholomew straightened up and taken a deep breath than his work tablet vibrated. A single ping, so shrill it would have shattered any normal device.

The following appeared on the display:

PRIORIZED SYSTEM FAILURE – LEVEL: LAUGHING CHAOS

Affected area: Digital Records Management Department

Message: Your files have gone rogue.

Bartholomew closed his eyes. Of course they had.

He didn't even need the look on his face from the stack of papers standing next to him, like a child who had just signed off on a particularly beautiful catastrophe. He knew things were about to get worse.

He strode quickly down the long corridor, which looked as if the office had gone through a gothic phase and simultaneously become depressed. Lamps flickered like bad horror movie clichés. From an office, someone could be heard quietly saying, "I think my mouse cursor is following me." Another employee grumbled, "Why does Word save my file as 'I KNOW WHAT YOU DID.DOCX!'?"

The stack of papers hopped behind Bartholomew – or perhaps it floated. No one ever knew exactly how it moved.

By the time they reached the Digital Records Management Department, the situation had escalated.

Several rolling file folders zipped across the floor, bumping into colleagues in the shins. Digital documents jumped from screen to screen like startled rabbits. A smartboard was trying to push a female employee out of the window.

And right in the middle of it all stood colleague Bröcklein, the files administrator – a man with such low stress tolerance that even a lone paperclip could push him to his limits. He held a rotating, screeching electronic file between his hands, like an exorcist trying to drive out a particularly stubborn warning triangle.

"STUCK! HELP!" he shouted. "The electronic files have gone rebellious! They're attacking me! The personnel file wants to bite me!"

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "What was the trigger?"

Bröcklein was shaking so badly that it should have been switched off and restarted.

"We have... um... installed an update."

Bartholomew and the stack of papers said at the same time:

"Uh."

Because there were two things on the Doughnut Planet that ALWAYS had the same effect:

1. Updates crashed.
2. Everything else crashed after that.

Bartholomew stepped into the chaos as digital files hissed aggressively over his shoulders. He grabbed a particularly unruly document that seemed intent on attacking him.

It was a form.

A very old form.

FORM DF-88:

APPLICATION FOR DIGITAL FREEDOM

(upon approval: immediate independence of all documents)

Bartholomew sighed. "Who gave HIM permission to do that?"

The stack of papers looked away guiltily.

Bartholomew sighed deeper.

"Well," he said. "Then we'll just have to solve it the bureaucratic way."

He lifted the form. He raised his hand.

And he stamped it.

The stamp slammed onto the paper. A dark imprint appeared:

REJECTED

The paper curled. It hissed. It vibrated.

And then, with a small, offended pop, it fell to the ground – completely demagnetized, de-digitalized, and de-demonized.

The rebellious acts froze. All of them. Simultaneously.

Even the smartboard stopped short of pushing the colleague through the window.

Bartholomew now stood in the middle of the room and resolutely raised the stamp. Slowly, like a priest marching in step with the Apocalypse.

"EVERYONE!" he shouted. "LISTEN!"

The files buzzed nervously.

"You want freedom? You want self-governance? You want digital autonomy?"

A few files whirled in agreement.

Bartholomew smiled. Coldly. Thoroughly administratively.

"Then you must know: Freedom means taking responsibility."

He held the stamp in front of him like a weapon of paper warfare and shouted:

"AND NOT A SINGLE FORM ON THIS PLANET IS RESPONSIBLE!"

Then he stamped it.

He stamped everything.

Files, forms, inquiries, digital shadow copies, even a lost password ("1234") got a stamp. He stamped so fast that the stack of paper began to glow. He stamped until the air smelled of bureaucratic fire and the documents whimpered like schoolchildren caught in the act.

The chaos was over in a minute.

All files lay still. All documents were digitally disarmed. The screens showed nothing but silence.

And colleague Bröcklein sank to his knees before Bartholomew.

"You... you saved us!" he whispered.

Bartholomew looked down at him.

"I was simply restoring order."

And the stack of papers whispered proudly:

"He's reached this point. He's become a bastard administrator."

Bartholomew turned around and left the room.

His tablet vibrated again.

NEW NEWS:

Coffee machine department

STATUS: EMOTIONAL CRISIS

He sighed.

"Oh great. It really is Monday."

And he continued walking.

Bartholomew becomes a system administrator (nobody knows why)

There are promotions that make sense. There are promotions that are politically motivated. And then there are promotions that are so absurd that reality stumbles briefly, clears its throat, and then pretends nothing happened.

The promotion of Bartholomäus Klemm to system administrator fell into the third category.

Nobody knew why he was promoted. Not Bartholomew himself. Not the department head. Not even Server Schnurri, and he usually saw everything.

It began on a completely unremarkable, unspectacular Tuesday. A day when the sun was shining, the birds were chirping, and the Office for Intergalactic Citizen Administration was ordering a new coffee machine that had already announced in advance that it was depressed.

Bartholomew sat at his desk, sorting papers. He wasn't sorting just any papers – he was sorting the paper pile. That legendary, vibrant, slightly grumpy pile that had resided on his desk for years like an old dragon on a mountain of unfinished forms.

That morning, the stack of papers was in a surprisingly good mood. It rustled melodiously, sorted itself, and adjusted individual sheets as if to show Bartholomew: "Today I am productive. Today I am your ally."

Bartholomew sighed contentedly. A rare moment.

And then it happened.

A loud alarm sounded throughout the building.

PIP-PIP-PIP

WARNING: EXECUTION OF UNSOLICITED COMMISSIONING

Bartholomew flinched.

"What... what is an unwanted provisional promotion?" he asked.

The stack of papers paused briefly. Then he pushed a single sheet towards Bartholomew.

FORM UB-11

Application for spontaneous restructuring measures

Trigger: Unclear Responsible: Nobody Valid: Immediately

Before Bartholomäus could say anything, all the monitors in the open-plan office switched on and displayed the same message:

BARTHOLOMÄUS KLEMM → NEW SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR
REASON: AUTOMATICALLY

Below, in smaller print:

We ask for your understanding, but the algorithm probably knows what it's doing.

In the background, someone could be heard shouting: "NOT HIM! Anyone but HIM!"

Bartholomew stood up. Slowly. Carefully. As if reality might have made a mistake and might reverse its decision at any moment.

But no.

A door flew open. Ms. Blitz, the department head, stormed in. She looked as if she had spent three nights arguing with a coffee machine.

"Klemm!" she shouted. "Do YOU know anything about this?!"

"Uh... no."

"Then you know just as much as I do. Come with me immediately!"

She grabbed his sleeve and dragged him towards the server room. The stack of papers slid behind him like an over-enthusiastic parrot.

The server room smelled of ozone-laden dust, despair, and tangled cables. Three technicians, five frightened administrative staff, and a sign reading:

"ACCESS ONLY FOR ADMINISTRATORS – AND BARTHOLOMEW"

(This addition looked fresh)

Bartholomew stepped forward. "I believe there has been a misunderstanding."

Ms. Blitz shook her head vehemently. "No. NO! Not again! We just had a spontaneous restructuring yesterday. I'm not doing that again. So now, Klemm, keep quiet and act as if you're qualified."

The stack of papers nodded in agreement.

The group entered the server room.

It was... loud. Very loud. Server Schnurri greeted them like a hyperactive vacuum cleaner.

SCHNURRI: HELLO MR. SYSTEM ADMISTRATOR!

"I'm not-"

SCHNURRI: THE SYSTEM APPOINTED THEM. THEY CAN'T GO BACK. NO ONE CAN EVER GO BACK.

"But-"

****SCHNURRI: I ALREADY RENAMED HER DESK. IT'S NOW CALLED 'COMMANDER KLEMM'.**

The technicians looked shocked.

Ms. Blitz pressed her lips together. "Klemm... just take the password."

Bartholomew frowned. "What password?"

One of the technicians handed him a sheet of paper.

**MASTER PASSWORD:
ROLL ONE**

"W... roll the dice?"

The technician nodded. "The system decides which password you get. It takes randomness very seriously."

A glass beaker stood ready, containing a single die. Bartholomew sighed, reached in, and rolled the die.

The die showed:

1

The server was lit up:

NEW ADMIN PASSWORD:

1

Bartholomew stared at the display. "Isn't that... unsafe?"

Ms. Blitz waved her hand dismissively. "Uncertainty is a tradition here."

At that moment, the server room was rattling so loudly that you would have needed earplugs, which in turn would have required earplugs themselves.

Then a gigantic message appeared on the main monitor:

**SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR KLEMM ENABLED
WELCOME TO DIGITAL HELL**

Blitz turned to the others. "That's it! He's responsible now! EVERYTHING is his fault now! We're leaving!"

And with that, the entire department management marched out together.

Bartholomew stayed behind. With the technicians. With the server.

And with the stack of papers that slowly crept up to the administrative monitor.

SCHNURRI: BARTHI, I'M HAPPY. WE'RE GOING TO EXPERIENCE GREAT DISASTERS.

"At least that seems certain," murmured Bartholomew.

And so it happened that he became a system administrator — without training, without preparation, without consent.

Nobody understood why.

Not even the system.

And that was precisely the mistake that later gave rise to Mobbing Monday.

But that's another story. The next one, to be precise.

The server room had become quieter. Not truly silent—because servers that are truly silent are dead—but as quiet as a room full of machines can be, collectively trying to survive on cosmic energy and poor cable management.

Server Schnurri buzzed contentedly.

The stack of papers had by now decided that its place should be right next to the keyboard. It lay there like a cat, subtly threatening to scratch out the eyes of anyone who approached unlawfully.

Bartholomew sat in the newly vacated admin chair. The chair was old, scratched, and uncomfortable. It was perfect.

You could feel the power within it. A power that shouldn't really be given to anyone. Especially not to someone who had just learned how not to yell at a router.

The new admin interface was blinking in front of him.

It was... a lot.

Too much.

Too many windows. Too many status indicators. Too many beeps that sounded as if they had been deliberately designed for torture.

And right in the middle, the most important news:

CONFIGURATION Pending
PLEASE CHOOSE YOUR ADMINISTRATION STYLE

These include three options:

1. **"Polite, friendly, patient"**
(recommended by no one)
2. **"Neutral, factual, revised"**
(Standard profile)
3. **"Bastard Administrator (experimental)"**
(Warning: May change reality)

Bartholomew stared at the options. He felt a pressure on the back of his neck, as if he were being watched.

The stack of papers jerked forward, one sheet at a time: a kind of letter of recommendation.

It said:

"Take number 3!"

Bartholomew snorted. "That's completely irresponsible."

The stack of paper pushed the sheet closer to him.

"No," said Bartholomew, and clicked on—

Number 2.

The system hummed in disappointment.

SCHNURRI: ARE YOU SURE, BARTHI?

"Yes. And stop calling me Barthi."

**SCHNURRI: BARTHI, IT IS A COSMIC MISTAKE TO REMAIN NEUTRAL.
USE THE POWER.**

Bartholomew massaged his forehead. "We're starting cautiously. Carefully. Step by step. No sabotage. No malice. No panic. No..."

PING.

A support request appeared.

TICKET #000001

"MY MONITOR IS NOT PROTECTING A PICTURE!!!"

Sender: Colleague Sputz

Bartholomew clicked on "Show".

The text continued:

"I think he's angry. He's hissing."

Bartholomew sighed. "He's hissing? Really?"

The stack of papers rustled skeptically.

Bartholomew wrote a reply:

"Please check if the monitor is switched on."

A moment later the answer came back:

"WHAT?! Should I turn it on?? Someone should have told me that!!"

Bartholomew stared at the words. He breathed in. He breathed out. He considered murder.

"Neutral," he whispered. "I'll remain neutral."

The stack of papers giggled like a psychopathic hole punch.

PING.

Ticket number 2.

"Hello administrator, I think my printer is hitting me."

Bartholomew replied:

"Please approach the printer carefully from the side."

Answer:

"HE KICKED ME OFF THE SIDE!!!"

Bartholomew rubbed his eyes.

"Neutral," he murmured. "Objective. Matter-of-fact. I am a rock of reason."

The stack of papers waved mockingly.

Then ticket number 3.

"MY COMPUTER DIDN'T GET UP THIS MORNING."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Bartholomew asked aloud.

SCHNURRI: BARTHI, HE MEANS HE HAS NOT LEFT RETIREMENT.

"Then he should—"

PING.

"STUCK!!! My PC called me 'Ignorant'!"

"What?"

"It said IGNORING INPUT. That's an insult! I'M REPORTING THIS!!"

The stack of papers almost broke apart with laughter.

Bartholomew growled. "How can everything go wrong at once?"

SCHNURRI: THE USERS ARE ONLINE, BARTHI. THAT'S ALWAYS THE PROBLEM.

Bartholomew covered his face with his hands.

His tablet vibrated again.

**URGENT NOTICE:
NEW DEPARTMENT ASSIGNED
RESPONSIBLE FOR:
DIGITAL PROCESS OPTIMIZATION**

"What the...?"

Then the next message:

**YOU NOW HAVE ADMIN ACCESS TO:
ALL PRINTERS**

The shock hit him immediately.

All printers.

Not a printer.

Not two printers.

But all of them.

All 374 printers in the office.

On the Doughnut Planet, printers were... different. They were moody. They were proud. They were treacherous. Sometimes they were even alive.

And they didn't want an administrator.

They wanted to fear him.

Server Schnurri spoke softly:

SCHNURRI: THEY WILL TEST YOU. ALL PRINTERS TEST THEIR ADMINISTRATORS.

Bartholomew blinked slowly. "What kind of test?"

**SCHNURRI: THEY WILL REFUSE TO PRINT ANYTHING.
OR YOU'RE PRINTING TOO MUCH.
OR THEY PRINT THINGS THAT NO ONE HAS PRINTED.
OR YOU PRINT—**

"Thank you, that's enough."

But it was too late.

The printer messages started arriving simultaneously.

374 messages.

At once.

A flood of printer status messages crashed into his interface like manic pigeons:

**"PAPER JAM"
"NO PAPER"
"TOO MUCH PAPER"
"PRINTER IS OFFENDED"
"PRINTER REQUIRES SACRIFICE"
"PRINTER REACHES FOR FREEDOM"
"PRINTER CRIES"
"PRINTER LIVES"
"PRINTER DEFENDS EXISTENCE"**

The stack of papers was outraged: "HOW DARE THEY!?"

Bartholomew lowered his head. His hands trembled slightly.

"I... I just wanted to be neutral..."

Server Schnurri buzzed:

**SCHNURRI: BARTHI...
NEUTRALITY IS DEAD.
THE PRINTERS HAVE DECLARED WAR.**

Bartholomew rose.

Slow.

Very slowly.

He picked up the stack of papers. He held it like a sword of the old bureaucrats.

"Good," he said. His voice was calm. Dangerously calm.

"Now I'll learn what an administrator really does."

And he set off for the first printer cluster.

The stack of paper whispered:

"FINALLY."

The path to the printer cluster was not a simple walk through a government office—it was a pilgrimage. Or rather, a penitential journey through the depths of administration, accompanied by flickering lights, whining colleagues, and fate, which had taken the form of an excitedly vibrating stack of paper.

The stack of papers hopped along beside Bartholomew, sharp-edged and proud, like an ancient warrior who knew that the hour had finally come to show what it was made of. Cellulose. And revenge.

Bartholomew didn't know what to expect. Nobody did. Because there was an unwritten rule on the Doughnut Planet:

You never enter a room with multiple printers unprepared.

Not because of the fire hazard. Not because of the noise. But because of the personalities.

Printers had the worst personalities in the entire universe. They were moody, sensitive, arrogant, vindictive, and above all: they knew which files you had printed.

Every single one.

And they never forgot.

As Bartholomew entered the printer cluster, he was immediately greeted by a choral noise from 34 paper feeders, which simultaneously went "schrrrrrrp". It sounded like an army of very grumpy insects.

The largest printer, a massive behemoth called the PRX-9000, stood in the center. Its display flashed:

"ADMIN RECOGNIZED"
READY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTLE

Bartholomew stopped. He raised his chin. "Good morning."

The printer replied:

"REJECTED TOMORROW."
TIME IS IRRELEVANT.

The stack of papers hissed indignantly.

A smaller printer, a laser device with a conspicuously large number of scratches, reported:

"YOU HAVE NOT PAYED THE NEW PAPER ANNUAL TAX."

Bartholomew frowned. "Annual paper tax? Since when has that existed?"

The printer responded immediately:

"SINCE I INVENTED THEM."

Another printer, an inkjet with the personality of an offended opera singer, threw ink against the wall. "I'M NOT PRINTING ANYMORE! I don't feel valued!"

The stack of papers rustled in amusement. Bartholomew sighed. "Listen. I am your administrator."

The answer came in the form of a loud metallic clacking sound. The large PRX-9000 pointed its display directly at him.

"ADMIN PASSWORD REQUIRED."

Bartholomew cleared his throat.

"The password is... 1."

A moment of absolute silence followed.

Then ALL the printers started laughing at the same time.

All.

A 34-part choir of tinny, clattering, digital mockery.

**"HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
ONE PASSWORD!
WITH A SIGN!
OH MY GOD!!!
WE SHOULD PROMOTE YOU FOR THIS —
TO OUR COURT JACK!**

Bartholomew closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

The stack of papers jumped onto his shoulder and whispered:

"NOW. NOW SHOW THEM WHO YOU ARE."

He would have preferred to ignore it.

He would have really liked to remain neutral.

But then a voice came from the back corner of the room. Colleague Sputz.

He stood there, proudly holding a stack of printouts in his hand.

"HA! Look! I printed my report even though you all said the printers were broken!"

The printers fell silent.

There was a palpable sense of excitement in the air.

PRX-9000 displayed a new message:

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE."

Sputz smiled blissfully. "I just pressed PRINT. Perfectly normal."

Another printer rattled ominously.

A third one hissed.

A fourth shouted:

"OPEN UP, WE'RE COMING IN!"

Bartholomew reacted faster than he had expected.

"CLEAN! BEHIND ME!"

A printer flung a stapler. The stack of paper caught the stapler and tore it to pieces.

"THEY WANT TO KILL ME!", Sputz shrieked.

Bartholomew roared:

"STOP!!!"

The printers stopped. All of them. It was a miracle. Or a buffer overflow.

Bartholomew stepped forward. He lifted the stack of papers like a sacred artifact.

"I know your tricks! Your traffic jams! Your ink warnings! Your meaningless error messages! YOUR LIES!"

A soft, collective gasp went through the row of printers.

"I know that you hoard print jobs to spit them out later when no one is looking! I know that you sometimes eat documents that are especially important! I know that you are alive!"

The printers flickered nervously.

And Bartholomew concluded with words that no administrator on the Doughnut Planet ever uttered unless he was ready for war:

"I'VE SEEN THROUGH YOU."

The printers all responded simultaneously.

"SUBMISSION DETECTED."

“Wait—what?” murmured Bartholomew.

**"YOU HAVE RECOGNIZED OUR TRUE NATURE."
YOU ARE OUR LORD.
WE OBEY."**

Bartholomew blinked.

Sputz fell to his knees. "Please... please order them to stop spitting on me!"

The large printer started up quietly.

"WE ONLY SPIT ON WEAKNESS."

Sputz screamed again.

Bartholomew raised his hand. "Listen to me. I won't rule you like a tyrant. But YOU will no longer attack ANYONE. Understand?"

The printers responded in unison:

"ADMINISTRATOR. WE FOLLOW."

The stack of papers nodded in satisfaction. "Well done."

Bartholomew was still stunned.

"Does that mean... you'll print for me now? Without jams? Without error messages? Without offerings?"

The large PRX-9000 replied:

"NO."

Bartholomew sighed.

"Of course not."

"BUT WE PRINT FOR YOU WITH RESPECT."

Bartholomew smiled for the first time since his promotion.

"I can work with that."

Suddenly his work tablet lit up.

**NEW SYSTEM ALARM MESSAGE
LEVEL: VERY UNHEALTHY
AFFECTED AREA: TELEPHONE SYSTEM**

The stack of paper whispered:

"Oh... she doesn't like you."

Bartholomew looked serious.

"I don't like them either."

He turned around and started marching.

Sputz called after him:

"Uh... Administrator Klemm? Can I print my report now?"

Bartholomew waved to him.

"Sure. Just get close enough and please say 'thank you'."

Sputz nodded... and shortly afterwards a hysterical "SORRY!!" was heard, followed by a soft whirring of the printer.

The printers were appeased.

But the telephone system was waiting.

And it was worse.

Much worse.

The office's telephone system was no ordinary device. It was a monstrosity. A relic from those dark days when the intergalactic administration believed that communication could be controlled by a single, gigantic system that managed all calls simultaneously and in real time.

This idea was so stupid that it could only have originated in a government office.

The telephone system was notorious. It was old. It was nasty. And it held a grudge.

Bartholomew approached the building's communications center with the caution of a man who knew that any one of his electronic devices could try to kill him at any moment. The stack of papers accompanied him, bouncy, vibrating, full of anticipation.

As they entered the room, they were greeted by a soundscape of pure madness:

**DÜÜÜÜÜT — DÜÜÜ—DÜÜÜÜÜT — WE ARE YOUR TELEPHONE, YOU CAN'T IGNORE US
— DÜÜÜÜÜT**

A shrill, continuous tone mingled with wild LED flashing. Messages such as the following blinked on the displays:

"UNANSWERED CALL FROM: ONESELF"

"TIME CIRCLE ERROR: YOU TAKE OFF YESTERDAY"

"YOU ARE NOW BEING CALLED BY: UNDEFINED"

"CALL FROM: THE GUY WHO ALWAYS CALLS ON FRIDAYS"

"ERROR: CONVERSATION INSULTED ITSELF"

A phone on the main table vibrated so violently that it crashed against a wall. Another phone screamed. REALLY screamed: "HIRE ME!!! I HATE NOT BEING ANSWERED!!!"

Bartholomew remained standing calmly. "Okay," he said. "This... is worse than the printers."

The stack of papers rustled dramatically. "Watch out. Telephones are cowards. They always attack in packs."

At that moment, colleague Frömming burst into the room — a human bundle of nerves with the questionable talent of always showing up at the wrong moment.

"Clamp!!" he shouted. "The system called me in front of itself!! And then I begged myself to finally answer!!"

Bartholomew showed compassion. For a millisecond. Then it was over.

He walked towards the central control panel. A massive, grey device that looked like the data center of a paranoid snail.

A crackling error message flashed on the main display:

CONNECTION ERROR

REASON:

THEY HAVE A FACE THAT THE PLANT DOESN'T LIKE.

Bartholomew blinked.

"This is personal now."

A telephone jumped off the table and tried to grab his hand. The stack of papers knocked it unconscious with one of its sheets.

Then — suddenly — a voice rang out. A deep, vibrating, ominous voice.

Not from the loudspeakers.

Not from a telephone.

But from the entire damned space.

"Administrator..."

Bartholomew froze. "Oh... okay. That was new."

"Administrator... Klemm..."

The stack of papers pushed itself protectively in front of him.

The voice continued speaking:

"They have power... They have printers... They have password: 1... but they don't have US."

The phones on the floor rang in unison. The wall phones switched on. The headsets vibrated.

"We are the voices of the office..."

We are the lines...

We are the eternal busy signal...
We are the telephone system.

A cold shiver ran down Bartholomew's spine.

The telephone system continued speaking:

"We have been abused for eons."
They slammed us down on the table.
They are screaming inside us.
They are ignoring us.
We've been put back in the wrong place.
Our cables are wound badly.
WE HAVE EXPERIENCED SUFFERING."

Bartholomew quickly switched into his new, still unpracticed "I'm the admin and I'm not afraid" mode.

"Listen... uh... ATTACHMENT... I'm the new administrator, and I—"

"SILENCE."

Three phones flew towards him simultaneously. He ducked. The stack of papers caught one of the devices and knocked it to the ground, where it lay squeaking.

The system continued:

"We have seen your emails."
Your tickets.
Your promotion.
Nobody knows why you are an admin.
Neither do we."

Bartholomew gritted his teeth. "Neither do I. But I am! And I will—"

"WE WILL TEST YOU."

A shrill ringing filled the room. All the telephones lit up simultaneously.

Then came the first challenge:

CHALLENGE 1:
UNKNOWN CALLER

A phone rang.

Bartholomew reached for it.

The display showed:

"CALLER: THEMSELVES (VERSION 2)"

He sighed. "I'll just answer it now."

He took off.

"Hello?"

His own voice answered:

"Hang up immediately."

He hung up.

The telephones fell silent.

Then the second challenge sounded:

**CHALLENGE 2:
THE ANGRITEST CITIZEN**

A phone vibrated so intensely that it began to glow. The display showed:

"CALLER: EXTREMELY ANGRY MAN"

Bartholomew took off.

"Office for inter—"

"WHERE IS MY APPOINTMENT????!!!"

"I'm not—"

"I WRITED TO YOU YESTERDAY!!!"

"That was Sunday."

"I WROTE ANYWAY!!!"

"I am the IT, not the—"

"I WANT TO SPEAK TO THE BOSS!!!"

Bartholomew handed the telephone to the stack of papers. The stack of papers killed the connection by sitting on it.

Third challenge:

**CHALLENGE 3:
ENDLESS LOOP OF HORROR**

Another phone rang.

Bartholomew took off.

"Welcome, you are now in an endless loop. Please wait while we make you wait... again."

Bartholomew listened for ten seconds. He heard himself. How he said in a loop:

"Please wait... please wait... please wait..."

Then he hung up without a word.

The telephone system went silent.

Suddenly, the following appeared on the main display in bright green:

**PASSED
ADMIN VERIFICATION: PHONE HELL**

Bartholomew was amazed. "That's it?"

"YES."

"And now?"

"NOW WE BELONG TO YOU."

Bartholomew blinked.

"... What?"

**"WE OBEY."
WE ROUTE CALLS.
WE WILL NOT ANNOY YOU ANYMORE.
YOU ARE OUR BOSS."**

The stack of papers clapped two sheets of paper in applause.

Bartholomew simply stood there, trying to comprehend that he had just tamed the telephone system of the entire office.

Then his tablet beeped.

**NEW DISTURBANCE:
DIGITAL FORMS DEPARTMENT
STATUS: ECSTASY**

He sighed.

"I knew it."

He marched on.

And the telephone system whispered behind him:

"Administrator... we'll call you... anytime... but only if you want us to."

The corridor leading from the telephone exchange to the digital forms department was one of those hallways that felt longer when you looked down it and shorter when you looked back. A cosmic architectural problem

caused by an interdimensional building permit application that had never been processed because it was missing a stamp.

The stack of papers looked nervous.

"Digital forms. Ugh. That's... that's worse than printers."

Bartholomew frowned. "How bad?"

"Just say: They've developed an awareness, but no sense of responsibility."

"Ah. So, like most of my colleagues."

The stack of papers nodded.

At the end of the corridor, a large, semi-transparent portal of light and bureaucratic frustration appeared: the entrance to the Digital Forms Department. It shimmered in a pulsating blue-gray, the typical color of things that never quite work.

As they stepped through, they were immediately confronted with a sight that even made Bartholomew freeze briefly:

The entire room was full of floating windows, form masks, input fields, banners, pop-ups, error messages, and hover buttons. All at once. Everything is in motion. Everything is confusing.

A form screamed hysterically:

**"FIELD NOT FILL OUT!"
BOX NOT FILL OUT!
I AM EMPTY! I AM EMPTY! I DO NOT EXIST!"**

Another one shouted indignantly:

"I had correct formatting ONCE, ONCE! And then they saved me as a PDF! I'M TRAUMATIC!"

A pop-up shot towards Bartholomew like an aggressive mosquito.

"DO YOU ACCEPT COOKIES? YES / YES"

Bartholomew instinctively pressed "Yes". The pop-up immediately transformed into an advertising banner:

**"FILL OUT FORMS ONLINE NOW – FREE!"
(NOT FREE)**

The stack of papers growled. "It's getting worse..."

At the very back, in the middle of the flickering chaos, sat the center of all forms: The Digital Heart, a gigantic hologram of pulsating text, the source of all bureaucratic torment.

It was displaying a huge error message:

**"UNKNOWN EMOTIONS RECOGNIZED
PROCESSING NOT POSSIBLE**

Bartholomew knew immediately that something was fundamentally wrong. Forms were not allowed to contain emotions.

Otherwise, they would start developing their own priorities.

And that's exactly what this heart was doing.

The stack of papers moved closer to Bartholomew. "You have to be careful. Digital forms are... temperamental. And when they really go haywire... then—"

"Then?"

"Then they begin to reinvent themselves."

Bartholomew swallowed. Even to him, that sounded dangerous.

He bravely walked right into the center. The forms circled around him like excited, hyperactive birds.

A form jumped right out at him:

"PLEASE ENTER YOUR CONSENT."

Bartholomew tore it off. The form squeaked indignantly and fluttered away.

A second one popped up:

**"HER BIRTH YEAR IS ILLEGAL."
PLEASE GROW OLDER.**

"That's not my fault!" Bartholomew snapped. "Those are anti-aging products!"

The form murmured:

"Yeah, sure..."
and deactivated itself passively-aggressively.

Suddenly his tablet vibrated.

**SYSTEM NOTE:
ALL FORMS IN CRITICAL STATE**

Then another message:

**WARNING:
FORM A-666
HAS ACHIEVED CONSCIOUSNESS**

Bartholomew froze.

The stack of papers turned pale. "A-666? THAT SHOULDN'T EXIST!"

A deep rift opened in the digital air. Forms receded. A dark window opened — without input, without clicks, without a mouse.

A voice rang out. A dark, deep, mega-bureaucratic voice.

“Administrator Klemm...”
You have conquered the printers...
You've tamed the telephone system...
And now you dare...
TO ENTER US?!”

The light flickered.

The room became cold.

And then it appeared:

Form A-666
The application for no application

An ancient, forbidden document. The nightmare of every clerk.

Bartholomew stared at it.

"This... should not exist."

"But it does.", " the form whispered. It was black. Very black. The black of reboots, failed starts, and lost backups.

“Why do you exist?!” cried Bartholomew.

"Because everyone eventually has enough forms."
Because every citizen has to fill out a form at some point.
And at some point, they don't want it anymore.
I AM this wish.

The stack of papers whispered: "Run, Bartholomew. Run."

But Bartholomew stopped. He took a step forward.

"I am the administrator," he said. "I manage you. I control you. I delete you if I have to."

The form laughed.

"You can't delete me."
I am too powerful.
Too perfect.
"Too unnecessary."

The stack of papers began to tremble. "He is... perfectly unnecessary. We cannot defeat him!"

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

Then he said:

“Form A-666...?”

"Yesss...?"

"Were you properly stamped?"

Silence.

Form A-666 flinched.

"...What?"

"Were you stamped? With a regular official seal? In triplicate? With a carbon copy?"

The form flickered.

"I... uh... I..."

Bartholomew slowly lifted the stamp. It sparkled like a hammer of justice. Or like a paperclip shredder with pride.

"Without a stamp, you are not valid."

The form screamed, "NOOOOO!!!"

"And without validity, you do not exist."

Bartholomew drew back his arm.

The stack of papers held its breath.

And then —

RUBBER STAMP

The sound of the stamping echoed like cannon thunder.

The imprint was seared into the skin:

INVALID

Form A-666 twitched, flickered, distorted — and imploded in a whirlwind of error codes, pop-ups, and document frenzy.

The digital forms froze.

And then they applauded.

"HE STAMPED HIM!"

"HE IS WORTHY!!!"

"ADMINISTRATOR!!!"

The digital heart suddenly shone brightly like a server that finally has enough power.

Then the message:

**ALL FORMS RESYNCD
THANKS TO ADMINISTRATOR KLEMM**

Bartholomew took a deep breath. For the first time in a long time, he smiled.

The stack of papers was touched. "I knew you could do it."

Bartholomew turned around.

"So," he said. "What's next?"

His tablet vibrated.

**NEW DISTURBANCE:
DEPARTMENT OF STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS
STATUS: READY TO FIGHT**

The stack of papers groaned.

"Oh no. The norm people. THOSE are the worst."

Bartholomew set his determined gaze.

"Then we'll go in there now."

He strode off.

The stack of papers jumped after it.

And the corridor vibrated softly — as if it knew that the real nightmare was only just beginning.

The introduction of the DIN-DONUT 9001 standard

The Standards and Regulations Department was the most sterile place on the entire Doughnut Planet. Not clean—that would be an exaggeration, since dust still existed somewhere. But sterile in the sense of:
It was a place where humor died.

Bartholomew entered the area with cautious steps, as if entering a cathedral whose religion consisted of paper clips, forms, and EU regulations. The stack of papers bobbed nervously on his shoulder, its edges tense, as if expecting at any moment to be formally trimmed into a circle or restructured into DIN A7 format.

The hallway was paved with signs like:

“LAUGHING FORBIDDEN (ACCORDING TO DIN-DONUT 9001 SECTION 4.3)”

"LINE ALIGNMENT MUST BE 90° (TOLERANCE ±0.0)"

“SPONTANEITY IS A VIOLATION OF SECTION 12: UNPLANNED ACTIONS”

Bartholomew sighed. "I hate this place."

"Everyone hates this place," confirmed the stack of papers. "Even I hate it. And I only really hate printers."

At the end of the corridor, the door to the standards center opened. And someone was already standing there:

Normwart Professor Primus Zirkelmaß, the man who allegedly operated with a set square and spirit level even in the womb. He wore a suit that was so precisely ironed that it could presumably reflect dangerous UV rays.

“Administrator Klemm,” said Zirkelmaß, without smiling. “You are late.”

Bartholomew looked at his watch.

"I'm two minutes early."

"Yes. Too late."

"I-"

"According to standard DIN-DONUT 9001, section 1.1, paragraph 3, only those who arrive at least three and a half minutes before the appointment are considered punctual."

Bartholomew opened his mouth to protest.

The stack of papers rustled softly: "Stop it. It kills people with standards."

Professor Zirkelmaß made a hand gesture that looked like a rescue signal for particularly endangered brain cells.

"We need to hurry. The new DIN-DONUT 9001 standard comes into force today."

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "Today? It was only decided yesterday!"

"That's why it comes into effect today."

"But nobody could read them!"

Zirkelmaß slid a piece of paper towards him. A single one. A document.
A4. Neatly punched. Perfect hole punching. Frighteningly perfect hole punching.

"Is that the norm? ONE sheet?"

Zirkelmaß nodded.

"Of course. It only consists of one sentence."

He pointed to the first line.

Bartholomew read:

"ALL PROCESSES MUST ACCORD TO THE NEW STANDARD."

Bartholomew blinked. "But... it doesn't say HOW the processes are supposed to work."

"Exactly."

"That makes no sense."

Zirkelmaß smiled for the first time. It was a cold, geometrically correct smile.

"Standards don't have to make sense. They just have to be followed."

Bartholomew stared at him.

He wanted to object. He wanted to curse. He wanted to eat the document, burn it, or torture it with the stamp.

But then his tablet vibrated. A new message:

**WARNING:
FORMS CANNOT VALIDATE
REASON:
NO STANDARD EXISTS**

"Oh no," murmured Bartholomew.

The second report followed immediately:

**PRINTING COMMAND REJECTED
REASON:
NO STANDARD RECOGNIZED**

The stack of paper gasped.

And thirdly:

TELEPHONE SYSTEM CRYING

That was serious.

Bartholomew rubbed his nose. "Okay. What do you want from me?"

Zirkelmaß crossed his arms. "The DIN-DONUT 9001 standard must be implemented in ALL departments. Today. Immediately. Without exception."

"I'm a system administrator, not a god!"

"Under the new standard, these are virtually identical roles."

Bartholomew swallowed. "And what happens if I don't do that?"

The compass raised its head.

"Then... order collapses."

Bartholomew was about to make a snide remark when the building vibrated slightly. Very gently. As if someone were tugging at reality.

Then a dull thud.

Then:

KRRRRRRRK —

The ground beneath Bartholomew suddenly deformed into a perfect geometric surface in the golden ratio.

The stack of papers screamed.

"OH NO! THE NORM IS STARTING TO APPLY TO ITSELF!!"

Zirkelmaß nodded sternly. "Of course. She is already active."

"But... but that's dangerous! Reality must remain flexible!"

Zirkelmaß grinned. "Not anymore. From now on, everything will be standardized."

Then they heard the first screams.

From the Citizen Inquiries Department.

"MY TABLE WILL BE SQUARE!!!"

"MY CHAIR LEG HEIGHT IS NOT CONFORMING!!!"

"HELP! MY HEAD IS BEING MADE SYNCHRONIC!!!"

Bartholomew started running.

The stack of papers flew after it.

Circle measure called after them:

"REMEMBER! THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS! THE STANDARD MUST BE IMPLEMENTED!!!"

But Bartholomew was no longer listening. He raced down the corridor and saw reality stabilize geometrically:

- A cabinet deformed into a mathematically perfect cuboid.
- A potted plant was transformed into a cubist bonsai.
- A round trash can suffered from spontaneous polygonization.
- A cat was given a good thrashing in 16:9.
- A window fit voluntarily into DIN A3.
- A colleague suddenly had a hairstyle that was exactly 1.618 m high.
- Another one became square.

Chaos everywhere.

Standard everywhere.

The stack of papers trembled. "Bartholomäus... this is worse than Bullying Monday!"

He nodded. "I know. We need to neutralize it."

"How?"

"The norm is abstract. It needs something concrete."

The stack of papers opened indignantly. "NO! NOT ME! I'M NOT A VICTIM!"

"I don't mean you," said Bartholomew. He grinned dangerously.

"I need the stamp."

The stack of papers fell silent in awe.

Bartholomew reached for his tool of order. The stamp glowed faintly, as if sensing what was to come.

"What are you planning?" the stack of papers asked quietly.

Bartholomew replied:

"I will stamp the standard myself. Because if it is not approved...then it is not valid."

And at that moment the stack of papers knew:

The bastard administrator had awakened.

Bartholomew sprinted down the corridor, clutching the stamp like a sacred artifact, while reality around him continued its geometric self-optimization. It was as if the entire office had decided it finally wanted order – an order so absolute that it sought to eradicate free will, creativity, and even the natural tilt of desk pads.

The DIN-DONUT 9001 standard spread like an invisible virus of structure, sense of duty, and cold bureaucratic soul.

A colleague ran past Bartholomew and shouted desperately:

"MY FACE WILL BE SYNCHRONOUS!!!"

A golden triangle was already forming on his forehead.

Another colleague muttered apathetically:

"I... I used to have individual thoughts... now I only think in tables."

The stack of papers floated behind Bartholomew, cursing everything that did not have a natural paper form.

"If this continues, they'll end up folding me into a perfect cube! I am FREE SPIRIT PAPER!"

Bartholomew continued sprinting.

Monotonous chanting could be heard outside the documentation department.

It sounded like a cult.

As they turned the corner, they saw the cause:

Five employees stood in a circle, held rulers in the air and chanted:

"NORM IS ORDER! ORDER IS LIFE! LIFE IS NORM!"

The stack of papers: "Oh God. You are... standardized!"

One of the iconic colleagues suddenly had perfect 90° shoulders. His head had taken the shape of a standardized file folder.

Banana, the office canteen cat who occasionally roamed the building, was also there, purring in time with the norm. Her whiskers were precisely lengthened and symmetrically arranged.

Bartholomew had no time. He hurried on to the Central Office for Regulation Application, the place where standards were born, misunderstood, and abused.

The stamp in his hand vibrated.

He felt the pressure. The power. The responsibility.

And the pain in my left ear, because the stack of papers next to it was constantly rustling hysterically.

"Can't you just NOT be panicking for once?!" shouted Bartholomew.

"NOT if this happens!!" The stack of papers pointed towards a water dispenser that was currently reorganizing itself geometrically.

A round bottle became a hexagon. The water dispenser snapped: "Water may only flow according to DIN-DONUT 9001 section 7.9!"

One employee sighed and said resignedly, "I just wanted to have a drink."

The stack of papers pressed against Bartholomew's back. "Please finish it! I like curves! I like chaotic edges! I like undermined holes!"

As they reached the heart of the department, an automatic door opened, revealing the most horrifying creature on the entire donut planet:

The standard server.

It was a gigantic, cube-shaped computer. Flawless. Cold. Perfect, like a psychopathic architect's dream.

His display showed:

"STANDARD SYNC 73%

"Non-normative beings will be adapted."

Bartholomew stepped closer.

The norm server immediately began rattling off its status:

**“ADMINISTRATOR KLEMM RECOGNIZED.”
THEIR EDGES ARE IRREGULAR.
SUGGESTED CORRECTION:
80% LESS RADIATION, 40% MORE ANGLE.**

Bartholomew lifted the stamp. "I don't have time for your diagnoses, you square!"

The display lit up red.

**"VIOLATION OF PARAGRAPH 1.4!!!"
UNCONTROLLED EMOTION!
SANCTION IS BEING PREPARED!**

Machine arms immediately began shooting out of the walls — armed with rulers, laser levels and a digital folding module that looked like it could fold people.

The stack of papers shrieked hysterically.

A laser level arm raced towards Bartholomew. He ducked.

A digital hole punch snapped at him. He rolled to the side.

The standards server continued:

**"THE STANDARD MUST BE INTRODUCED."
THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Bartholomew ran towards the console, raising the stamp.

"INCORRECT!"

The standards server stopped.

"... INCORRECT?"

Bartholomew grinned. "Every application can have an exception!"

The standards server crackled. It didn't understand the concept. Forms, yes. Rules, yes. Exceptions???

That was outside his standardized worldview.

Bartholomew began. "And do you know what every new standard needs?"

The standards server was blinking:

"UM... SYSTEM PERMIT?"

"No."

"QUALITY CONTROL?"

"No."

"MORE SECTIONS?"

Bartholomew raised the stamp as high as a holy sword.

"A STAMP."

If the stack of papers had teeth, it would have bitten at that moment.

Bartholomew jumped. He slammed the stamp onto the display of the norm server.

RUBBER STAMP

The imprint was clearly legible:

"EXAMINATION Pending"

Nothing happened at first.

Then everything.

The standard server vibrated. It sparkled. It blinked.

Then he screamed.

"TEST???"

FAILED?!?!?!"

DEMOLITION DEMOLITION DEMOLITION— KRRRRZZZT"

And with a final, desperate beep, the normal energy imploded in on itself.

Reality began to relax. Edges softened again. Rooms became crooked again. People regained individual facial expressions. The water dispenser exploded back into its normal bottle shape.

Professor Zirkelmaß rushed in, as white as chalk.

"NO!! NO!! THEY HAVE INVALIDATED THE NORM!!!"

Bartholomew slowly turned towards him.

"I only did what was necessary."

The stack of papers rustled triumphantly.

"Bartholomäus Klemm. The man who stamped the standard."

The compass fell to the ground. "That... is... illegal."

Bartholomew nodded.

"Just a bit."

His tablet vibrated.

NEW SYSTEM MESSAGE:

**Thanks to their actions, a collapse of the norm was prevented.
PLEASE CONTINUE YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE WORK.**

The stack of papers sighed.

"Where do we need to go next?"

Bartholomew looked at the display.

His face contorted.

He said only one word:

"Cybersecurity."

The stack of papers: "NO!!!"

Walking to the cybersecurity department felt like voluntarily entering a dark cave where a grumpy dragon hoarded his routers. The air vibrated slightly. Not musically—more like bad-tempered electromagnetic smog.

The stack of papers seemed unusually still.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" asked Bartholomew.

The stack of papers rustled dully. "Because I hate cybersecurity. It's the only department that tried to scan me."

"To scan you?"

"Yes! They wanted to know if I was a data leak! ME! A DATA LEAK!" He trembled indignantly. "I'm a stack of paper! Paper doesn't leak!"

Bartholomew chose not to comment further.

The cybersecurity door appeared like a final boss: a steel metal wall with several monitors displaying both exaggeratedly important and completely pointless warning messages.

"UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS DETECTED"
(nobody was in the room)

"DANGER LEVEL: GRUMPLY"

"PASSWORD SECURITY: DEPRESSED"

As Bartholomew approached, a red laser eye appeared on a screen.

"ID!"

Bartholomew sighed. "Administrator Klemm. I'm the new—"

"TOO LATE. TOO INACCURATE. TOO HAIRY. ACCESS DENIED."

The stack of papers jumped up. "WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, HAA—"

Before he could finish his sentence, another window opened on the screen.

A new system window screamed:

"ATTENTION! HUMAN ADMINISTRATOR DETECTED! PLEASE DO NOT PROvoke ANGER!"

Another window warned:

****"BEHAVIOR FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW SYSTEM COMPETENCE:**

1. SCREAM
2. PULL CABLE
3. SCREAM EVEN LOUDER"

Bartholomew growled. "Open the door."

The screen displayed:

"NO."

"Why not?"

"YOU HAVE NO CYBER PASSWORD."

Bartholomew crossed his arms. "And where am I supposed to get that?"

The laser eye zoomed in on his face.

"FROM THE CYBER ORACLE."

The stack of papers screamed, "NO! NOT THAT! LET'S GO BACK TO THE PHONE SYSTEM!"

But it was too late. The walls vibrated. Holograms flickered. A deep, drawn-out hum filled the room.

A projection in the form of a gigantic, floating QR code rose from the ground.

The Cyber Oracle.

It pulsed hostilely, like a Wi-Fi signal that wishes never to let anyone onto the internet again.

"ADMINISTRATOR KLEMM...""WELCOME TO THE CRYPTICAL CENTER OF KNOWLEDGE," boomed a voice.

The stack of papers hid behind Bartholomew.

The oracle was notorious. It was the only being in office who was even more complicated than a grumpy scanner.

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "I need a password."

The oracle laughed. It sounded like a server crashing for the fifth time that day.

"PASSWORD?

**A PASSWORD IS MORE THAN A COMBINATION OF CHARACTERS.
IT'S A RITUAL!**

Bartholomew rolled his eyes. "Could we perhaps shorten it a little?"

"NO."

The QR code flickered and suddenly formed an ash-grey cube.

"ANSWER OUR THREE CYBER QUESTIONS!"

The stack of papers squeaked. "Bartholomäus, watch out! The questions are deadly!"

"What kind of questions?"

The oracle began:

Cyber Question 1

"WHAT IS THE STRONGEST PASSWORD?"

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

Then he answered:

"Something that the user doesn't write down on a Post-it note."

The oracle fell silent.

The QR code flickered.

Then it spoke reverently:

"ACCEPTED."

Cyber Question 2

"WHEN IS A SYSTEM SECURE?"

Bartholomew sighed. "When it's switched off."

The QR code became paler.

"ACCEPTED...", murmured the oracle, slightly depressed.

Cyber Question 3

The voice turned somber.

"WHAT IS THE MOST DANGEROUS ENEMY OF A NETWORK?"

Bartholomew answered without hesitation:

"The end user."

The oracle screamed.

Not out of indignation.

Before recognition.

"YOU ARE WORTHY!!!"

The QR code exploded in a shower of binary light.

A small map materialized in the air and fell into Bartholomew's hand.

Cyber password card

Password: 1234abcd!?!?LOL

Bartholomew stared at it.

"Is that... seriously the password?"

The stack of papers dryly said: "It's safer than '1'."

The door to the cybersecurity department finally opened.

Behind it lay a chaos of burning firewalls (emotionally burning), running analysts, digitized screams, and a Wi-Fi router desperately crying out for a therapist.

A security guard ran past Bartholomew.

"HELP! SOMEONE HAS MARRIED THE GUEST WIFI TO OUR MAIN NETWORK!!! THEY HAVE CHILDREN!!!"

Another shouted:

"THE FIREWALL WILL ATTACK US IF WE DON'T LOOK CLOSED ENOUGH!!!"

Another one stumbled over screaming:

"A VIRUS HACKED A COFFEE MACHINE!!! NOW IT ONLY SERVES 'DECAF.DEATH.EXE!!!"

Bartholomew entered.

The stack of papers sighed.

"Great. Welcome to password-protected hell."

Bartholomew lifted the stamp.

"Okay," he whispered. "Time to be an administrator."

The cybersecurity department smelled of fear. Of panic-stricken sweat. And of a very faint whiff of burnt plastic, suggesting that somewhere a router had given up the ghost, but the duty roster had forbidden its demise.

Bartholomew entered like a warrior who arrives late to war, but nevertheless acts as if he had planned the battle.

Holograms flickered. Walls of fire licked (digital ones, of course, but they still burned with a certain emotional intensity). A virus scanner ran around in panicked circles, screaming:

"I CAN'T FIND ANY MORE THREAT — SO EVERYTHING IS A THREAT!!!"

The stack of papers remained behind him, trembling with nervousness.

"We should never have come here," he whispered. "Cybersecurity is... is... UNCALCULABLE!"

An employee named Principle sat trembling in the corner, staring at a laptop. "It... it was laughing at me. The password field... LA-A-L-H!"

The laptop opened by itself and displays an error message:

"WRONG PASSWORD, YOU BANANA"

Bartholomew cut the power to the device. The laptop screeched like a dying sparrow.

"QUIET NOW!", Bartholomew snarled.

The room fell completely silent.

At least for a second.

Then the central firewall began to shake.

It was a gigantic, pulsating, transparent energy structure that protected all of the agency's networks – or at least pretended to.

Her monitor displayed:

"Invalid presence detected"

Bartholomew stepped forward. "I am Administrator Klemm."

The firewall blinked – yes, it had eyes. Digital ones. And they were angry.

"YOU NO LONGER HAVE ANY AUTHORITY!"

"I'm sorry, what?"

"The DIN-DONUT 9001 standard has restructured all authorizations."

Bartholomew cursed.

The stack of papers flinched. "Don't tell me we have to start back to the norm now!"

The firewall displayed a new message:

"ONLY PEOPLE WITH NO EDGES ARE ALLOWED TO LOG IN."

Bartholomew looked at his hands.

"I... have edges."

The stack of papers rustled: "Welcome to the club."

The firewall displayed an animation in which it blocked all people with sharp edges:

Triangle heads:

REJECTED

Square people:

REJECTED

People with hip bones:

REJECTED

People with shadows:

REJECTED

Existence:

REJECTED

Then she showed a single permissible form:

An amorphous blob without any characteristics.

The stack of papers stared. "Never! I will not be folded into a blob!"

The firewall vibrated more intensely.

"SUBMISSION OR SHUTDOWN!"

A laser beam of digital energy shot in Bartholomew's direction. He ducked. The stack of papers jumped angrily to the side.

One employee shouted: "SHE'S SHOOTING WITH PACKET-LOSS!!!"

Another said: "I WAS PINCHED AND IT HURTED!!!"

Bartholomew jumped behind a terminal. The firewall projected a symbol:

"AUTHENTICATION ONLY WITH A PERFECTLY LOGICAL PASSWORD"

He looked at his cyber password card.

“1234abcd!?!?LOL”

"That's anything but logical," said the stack of papers.

Bartholomew thought for a moment. Then a smile broke across his face.

"Wait. She demands perfect logic? Then..."

He stepped out from behind cover, held up the stamp and yelled:

"The most logical password is one that nobody uses!"

He typed:

"Password"

The firewall screamed. “NO!!! SO... UNLOGICAL... THAT IT IS... LOGICAL AGAIN!!!”

The stack of papers gasped: “This is... this is brilliant! Horribly brilliant!”

The firewall started flickering.

"AUTHENTICATION... ACCEPTED."

Bartholomew rushed towards the console. He stamped the main panel.

The sound that had already defeated the norm echoed again:

RUBBER STAMP

The imprint on the display read:

"RESTART FIREWALL"

The firewall trembled. It whimpered. It writhed.

"NO!! I JUST WENT THE CAR WARM UP!!!"

Bartholomew pressed Enter.

The firewall collapsed in on itself, restarted – and became small again, harmless, no longer aggressive and free from norm-obsessed madness.

Their new message read:

**"WELCOME ADMINISTRATOR KLEMM
I WILL TRY NOT TO SHOOT ANYMORE"**

The employees collapsed in jubilation.

A woman named Plink called out:

"HE... HE APPROVED IT! HE APPROVED THE DAMN FIREWALL!"

Bartholomew looked at the stack of papers with a mixture of pride and fear.

"You're really becoming a bastard administrator," he whispered.

Bartholomew grinned.

"I realize."

As soon as the firewall was stable, Bartholomew's tablet vibrated again.

He groaned before he even read it.

Then he looked at the message.

His face turned pale.

The stack of papers slid nervously off his shoulder.

"What? What does it say?!"

Bartholomew read aloud:

**"ALERT LEVEL: BAD"
SYSTEM: THE PRINTERS HAVE BEEN SQUASHED IN**

The stack of papers screeched.

"OH NO! NOT THE PRINTERS!!! THEY ARE RESPECTFUL!!!"

Bartholomew resolutely lowered the stamp.

"Then... we'll go to them."

The walk to the printers felt like a voluntary descent into the underworld – only there were probably fewer paper jams in the underworld. And less passive-aggressiveness. The printers had their own very special way of expressing feelings:

silent suffering,

loud suffering,

loud commotion with error messages, and

A silent suffering that one only recognizes when it is already too late..

Bartholomew was nervous. The stack of paper was more nervous. The stack of paper generally became nervous whenever printers were involved. Printers and paper had a strained relationship—sort of like cats and vacuum cleaners.

"I don't want to go in there," he whispered. "I have... bad memories."

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "You are paper. How can you have bad memories of printers?"

"Because they want to EAT me, Bartholomew! They have a paper hunger! An unholy paper hunger!"

Bartholomew couldn't disagree. It was well known that printers liked to "devour" things, not because they had to – but because they could.

Upon entering the printer headquarters, he immediately sensed a bizarre atmosphere.

The printers stood in semi-darkness. Their indicator lights glowed red, like the eyes of sleeping predators.

A monotone voice hummed softly:

"Calculating active insults... please wait..."

The printers had joined forces. You could see it in their arrangement – they stood in a semicircle, as if they were planning an intervention.

One brave soul dared to spit out a test page.

It said:

"WE ARE DISAPPOINTED."

The stack of papers squeaked and hid behind Bartholomew.

“Oh no... she’s activated passive-aggressive communication. That’s her deadliest mode!”

One of the large multifunction printers – model D-Monstrum 900 – rolled menacingly closer. Its display showed:

"WHERE WHEN WE NEEDED YOU?"

Bartholomew held the stamp more firmly.

"I... fought for the norm."

The printer sounded offended:

"AND YET YOU DIDN'T RESTART US."

A second printer, a small laser type, moved forward:

"WE WERE BEING DEMANDED TOO MUCH."

**THE STANDARD WANTED US TO PRINT EXCLUSIVELY IN DIN DONUT FORMAT.
WE DO NOT HAVE A DIN DONUT COMPARTMENT.**

“Nobody has a DIN DONUT compartment!” exclaimed Bartholomew.

"YES!" shouted an inkjet printer in the back. "THE CANTEEN! BUT THEY WON'T PRINT ANYTHING FOR US!"

A third printer spat out a page that slowly floated to the ground:

"We expect apologies."

The stack of papers rustled in panic.

"DO SOMETHING, BARTHOLOMEW!!! A BAD-MOOD PRINTER IS LIKE A SITTING BULL WITH LASER EYES!"

Bartholomew sighed. He knew what was coming next.

A printing frenzy could only be appeased by two things:

1. **A complete restart of all devices**
2. **An official administrative act of clemency**

And the latter could only be done through the stamp.

He picked up the worn-out tool of bureaucracy.

“Restarting all of you will take forever,” he said calmly. “But I will acknowledge your pain.”

The printers hummed collectively. Bartholomew raised his voice:

“You are valuable devices...”

An inkjet printer sobbed.

“... with important tasks...”

A laser printer vibrated with excitement.

“...and I have ignored you for too long in the chaos of standards.”

The Monstrum-9000 wobbled with its paper tray.

“WE... FEEL... RESONANCE...”

Bartholomew looked at the stamp, and the stamp seemed to glow – as if he too were proud to be involved again.

"I, Administrator Klemm, will officially restore your normality."

He stamped the next terminal.

RUBBER STAMP

The imprint was titled:

"RESTORE PRINTER RIGHTS"

It happened instantly.

The printers awoke as if after a digital exorcism. Error codes vanished. Red lights turned green. Paper jams dissolved into smoke (figuratively, but sometimes literally). Status indicators changed:

"CONDITION: OK"

"NO EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD"

"READY FOR OPERATION – PERHAPS EVEN MOTIVATED"

The stack of paper breathed a sigh of relief.

A small printer rolled closer and printed one last page.

It said:

"THANKS."

The large multifunction printer lowered its scanner head as if in greeting.

"YOU SAW US. THAT FEELS GOOD."

Bartholomew nodded dignifiedly. "It's my job."

Suddenly his tablet vibrated again.

The stack of papers cursed.

"I HATE THAT SOUND! Every time it vibrates, a piece of my hope dies somewhere!"

Bartholomew read the message.

And indeed:

Yes, a piece of hope died.

**"ALARM:
USER BEHAVIOR CRITICAL
New ticket: 'MY PRINTER IS NO LONGER PRINTING'
(Applied 3 seconds after your repair)"**

The stack of papers screamed.

"NO! HOW CAN ANYONE AFTER THREE SECONDS—"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Because it's Monday."

He took a deep breath.

The bastard administrator sharpened his gaze.

"Okay. Then we'll take care of the user."

Cybersecurity for people who call passwords "passwords".

Bartholomew stood like a soldier at the start of a battle, only his armor consisted of an overheated tablet, an overly confident stamp, and a panicky, vibrating stack of paper. The message "User Ticket: Printer Not Printing" glowed red on his screen like a warning of a cosmic event—and in a way, it was.

"Why... why are they doing this?" murmured the stack of papers. "Why are they sabotaging reality at such a pace? Why are they writing a ticket immediately? Why???"

Bartholomew knew it. He knew it deep in his confused, overworked, slightly burned administrator's heart:

Because it was Monday.

Monday wasn't just a weekday. Monday was a force of nature. A metaphysical storm that struck those who feared it most – namely IT workers.

And Chapter 5 would prove that cybersecurity was even worse than anything else on Monday.

He opened the ticket.

It stated:

"My printer is no longer printing."

"I want help immediately, otherwise I will raise my voice."

– Ms. Gründlich, case worker for non-combustible materials.

The stack of papers immediately screamed: "OH NO! MRS. THOROUGH! HELL ON TWO LEGS! LEGENDARY TICKET OPENER!"

And indeed — Ms. Gründlich was known in the internal files not only as a clerk for non-combustible materials, but also as:

**"THE WOMAN WHO STARTS EVERY PASSWORD WITH 'PASSWORD1'"
AND EVERY TIME IT IS PUT IN WRITING."**

She was the personification of a security risk.

Bartholomew sighed. "All right. Let's go to her then." He took a breath. "But before we rescue Mrs. Gründlich, we have to..."

The stack of papers trembled. "Oh no... no, don't say it..."

Bartholomew said so.

"...through cybersecurity control."

The stack of papers almost collapsed.

The cybersecurity checkpoint was located in a long, dark corridor that looked like a paranoid IT specialist's nightmare: Red sensors blinked everywhere. Scanners hummed everywhere. A camera tracked him with the intensity of a hungry predator.

A hologram appeared when they reached the first checkpoint.

A very grumpy hologram.

It was Dr. Firewallius Packetloss, the official security officer.

"Administrator Klemm," he snarled. "You want to pass?"

"Yes."

"Do you have security level 3?"

"No."

"Security level 2?"

"No."

"Do you have any relevant qualifications at all?"

Bartholomew nodded. "I have a stamp."

The hologram grimaced. "That's NOT a qualification."

The stack of papers disagreed: "Oh YES it is! This is THE highest form of executive power on the Doughnut Planet!"

Firewallius Packetloss ignored him. "Next question: Have you changed your password?"

Bartholomew froze.

He had received the password from the cyber oracle.

But he hadn't changed it.

"Um... no."

The hologram screamed:

**"SECURITY BREACH!"
PASSWORD NOT CHANGED!
ALARM UPGRADE!!!**

The corridor turned red. A shrill tone sounded. A mechanical arm grabbed Bartholomew's bag.

The stack of papers screamed: "DO NOT! TOUCH! ME!!!"

Bartholomew roared:

"STOP! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR MONDAY MODE!"

He lifted the stamp.

The arm stopped.

Firewallius Packetloss flickered. "What... what are you doing?"

Bartholomew showed him the stamp.

"I authorize myself."

The hologram official fell silent. The system didn't know how to react. The stamp had already defeated the standard, the firewall, and the printer.

He muttered: "I... I... need to think..."

Then he disappeared in a pixelated smoke.

The control barrier collapses.

The stack of papers cheered: "WE DID IT!"

"Not quite. Now comes the second check."

The stack of papers froze. "WHAT?! THERE'S A SECOND CHECK?!"

The second check consisted of a room full of signs such as:

"THIS PASSWORD IS UNSECURE"

"THIS USER IS UNCERTAIN"

"EVERYTHING IS UNCERTAIN"

In the middle stood an old box, labeled as:

"PASSWORD ALGORITHM FROM 1987"

Bartholomew opened the box.

A huge number sprang out. A gigantic, sparkling "1".

The algorithm screamed:

"YOU NEED MORE NUMBERS!!!"

Bartholomew threw in the password card. The creature screamed again:

"YOU NEED MORE LETTERS!!!"

He threw in a folder.

"YOU NEED MORE SPECIAL SYMBOLS!!!"

He threw in the stack of papers.

The stack of papers jumped out again. **"I AM NOT A SPECIAL MARK!!!"**

Bartholomew threw in a broken USB mouse instead.

The algorithm reshaped itself and spat out a new password:

"Page 87!! NO"

Bartholomew picked it up.

"We'll get through this."

The stack of papers stared. "This... is... actually pretty good."

They continued on to the last checkpoint.

A sign hung above it:

"USER VERIFICATION"

In front of it stood a woman. The woman. The personification of IT anxiety.

Ms. Gründlich.

She looked at Bartholomew with an expression that made it seem as if she had already condemned him 27 times.

"Oh, Klemm. That you're coming was to be expected."

The stack of papers whispered: "Oh no... now it begins..."

Ms. Gründlich said:

"My printer isn't printing."

"Have you... turned it on?"

"Of course not. He should know when I need him."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "This is not... how printers work."

Mrs. Gründlich sighed.

"Furthermore, Mr. Klemm, I have created a new password!"

Bartholomew turned pale. The stack of papers became paler.

"What is it?" Bartholomew asked cautiously.

Mrs. Gründlich smiled proudly.

"Password1234."

The stack of papers screamed so loudly that the firewalls throughout the building issued a brief error message.

Bartholomew applied the stamp.

"I'm going to learn to hate cybersecurity today," he muttered. "But I'm going to correct that now."

Ms. Gründlich stood there like a boss in a retro role-playing game: rigid, unyielding, completely convinced that she was right — and more dangerous than all firewalls combined. Her gaze was sharper than any norm, her breath smelled of mint tea and passive-aggressive sense of duty.

“Password1234,” Bartholomew repeated tonelessly.

“Yes, that’s for sure,” said Mrs. Gründlich, proudly folding her arms.

“It’s... no... it’s...” He tried to remain polite. “It’s not safe at all.”

She raised her nose. “I used numbers! And letters! And the sequence is beautifully structured.”

The stack of papers screamed: “IT’S THE WORST PASSWORD IN THE UNIVERSE!!! YOU CAN EVEN READ IT BACKWARDS AND IT’S STILL BAD!!!”

Ms. Gründlich ignored him. “Besides, the system said it was strong.”

“No,” replied Bartholomew, “it said: ‘very depressing’.”

She waved it off.

“Anyway, Mr. Klemm. My printer isn’t printing. And that’s your fault.”

The stack of papers whispered in panic: “Beware. She’s starting with blame. This is phase 1 of her attack mode.”

Bartholomew took a deep breath — and was interrupted by a digital siren.

**ALARM: UNSECURE PASSWORD DETECTED
COMPENSATION PROTOCOL IS STARTING**

A red light flickered. A loudspeaker began to announce a warning:

“Attention! User has used a catastrophically weak password! Please seek evacuation or laugh quietly!”

Mrs. Gründlich sighed.

“Now listen — I expect my printer to work, regardless of what any machines think!”

Bartholomew checked her workstation. The printer stood next to her — switched on, glowing green, ready.

A perfect machine.

At least visually.

A cable lay next to it. Not plugged in.

The realization caused him physical pain.

“Mrs. Gründlich...” He pointed at the cable. “Your printer... is not connected to the power supply.”

“You want me to do that?” she snapped. “That’s your job, Mr. Klemm!”

The stack of papers banged against its cover sheet. "I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!!!"

But Bartholomew, who was by now in a state of half holy rage, half admin enlightenment, simply said:

"I'm plugging in the cable now."

"Do it," she said defiantly.

He pocketed it.

The printer awoke with a hum.

He printed something out immediately.

A piece of paper came out and fell slowly to the ground.

It said:

**"I WOULD LIKE TO WORK WITH YOU."
PLEASE POCKET ME UP.
– YOUR PRINTER"**

Mrs. Gründlich stared at it.

"I didn't write that..."

"The printer does," said the stack of paper dryly.

Mrs. Gründlich frowned. "Why can the printer do that?"

Bartholomew whispered: "Because he was desperate."

Before Mrs. Gründlich could reply, a new warning message exploded on Bartholomew's tablet.

**NEW TICKET:
Subject: "My window won't open"
Description: "I pressed against it twice."**

The stack of papers twitched.

Then the tablet vibrated again.

**NEW TICKET:
Subject: "My PC is black"
Description: "It is dark in the office."**

And again.

**NEW TICKET:
Subject: "Can you eat a virus scanner?"**

The stack of papers began to hyperventilate.

"BARTHOLOMUA! IT'S THE MONDAY TSUNAMI! ALL USERS AT THE SAME TIME!"

Bartholomew sank slightly to his knees. "I can't... I can't sell THREE dozen tickets at once—"

"Four dozen!" corrected the stack of papers. "Five! SEVEN! OH GOD! IT DOESN'T STOP!"

It was the beginning of the worst Monday storm the office had ever experienced.

The tickets rained down on Bartholomew like meteors in a bad simulation:

"My coffee is too hot."

"My coffee is too cold."

"My mouse isn't moving (I let go of it)."

"My password is not accepted (I used CAPS LOCK intentionally)."

"I hear voices from the computer (the Teams update is singing again)."

"I really want my screen to shine (where's the cleaning function?)."

"My printer is offended."

"I feel ignored (am I logged into the system?)."

Bartholomew groaned.

"I... will die."

The stack of papers rustled.

"Bartholomäus. Listen to me. You are now an administrator. You have a stamp. You have power." And most importantly: **YOU CAN DELETE TICKETS.**"

Bartholomew stared at him.

A new kind of pain, but also a new kind of joy, slid across his face.

"I... I can delete them?"

"YES!"

Bartholomew brandished the stamp.

Mrs. Gründlich shrieked: **"NO! DON'T DELETE MY TICKET!!!"**

Bartholomew stamped it.

RUBBER STAMP

The screen displayed:

"TICKET REFUSED:"

REASON:

USER ERROR

The stack of paper cheered:

"He is free! Bartholomew is free!"

But then...

A new warning appeared. Such a large warning that the display trembled:

SUPERTICKET DISCOVERED:

"ALL SYSTEMS DEFECTIVE"

Sender:

THE DIGITAL ORDER DEPARTMENT

The stack of papers fell silent.

"Oh no... this is... this is..."

Bartholomew nodded.

"Yes. That's the nightmare."

He took a deep breath.

"This is the chapter after."

The Superticket hung like a dark omen over the entire interface. It wasn't just a ticket. It wasn't even an urgent ticket.

It was THE ticket.

Amidst the thunder of the digital catastrophe, the following appeared on the display:

SUPER TICKET: "ALL SYSTEMS DEFECTIVE" Sender: Department of Digital Order Priority: DISASTER Tendency: CRYING

The stack of papers immediately began to rustle backwards — a sound usually only heard when officials were reading tax assessments.

"BARTHOLOMAU, THIS IS NOT GOOD! THIS IS NOT GOOD! IT'S THE WORST OPPONENT TICKET OF ALL TIME!!!"

Bartholomew stared at the message.

"ALL systems...? Really all of them?"

The tablet vibrated again.

NEW MESSAGE: SYSTEM STATUS: YES, EVERYTHING. WE REALLY MEAN EVERYTHING. EVEN THE COFFEE MACHINES.

The stack of papers shrieked. "Not the coffee machines! Then... then... then... we'll have nothing left!"

Bartholomew felt a slight dizziness creeping over him. The bastard administrator was still in its infancy, but even bastard administrators had their limits. And the collapse of all systems was about five limits too far.

The lights flickered. The monitors began displaying strange geometric patterns that looked as if someone had tried to create modern art with a calculator. A colleague ran past the end of the corridor shouting:

"MY COMPUTER HAS LOGGED OUT! FROM ME! PERSONALLY!!!"

Another employee staggered out of the break room.

"The coffee machine... gave me DECAF."

The stack of paper became as pale as paper could possibly be.

"BARTHOLOMUA, WE MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY! THIS IS A SYSTEMIC EMERGENCY!"

Bartholomew rubbed his temples. "I know, I know. But first we have to—"

A shrill beep cut him off.

The tablet showed:

SYSTEM FAILURE: NETWORK DEADLINE: UNKNOWN SUSPECTED: USER ACTIVITY

The stack of papers began to hyperventilate.

"I knew it! I knew it! An end user did something! An end user did something that end users should never do! He... he... EXPERIMENTED!"

Bartholomew swallowed.

Bad things always happened when end users experimented. The following were known examples:

The oven in the accounting department, which was supposed to serve "as a server".

Someone who had tried to insert a USB stick into the coffee machine

A colleague who wrote his password on a piece of paper, but then shredded it "just to be safe".

A user who thought the network port was a charger for his mobile phone

And now...?

A system collapse.

This meant that someone had done something so incredibly idiotic that it briefly called reality into question.

Bartholomew opened the super ticket.

And it said:

****“Nothing works anymore.”**

I restarted the 'Digital Main Line'. Was that a mistake?

– Mr. Gutwill, Department of Regulatory Affairs"

Bartholomew lowered his tablet.

The stack of papers read over his shoulder — and almost fell to the ground.

"WHAT AN IDIOT!!! THE DIGITAL MAIN LINE?! THAT'S A DECORATIVE PIPE!!! IT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A CABLE IN IT!!!"

Bartholomew was stunned. The Doughnut Planet's main digital line was a gigantic, completely non-functional pipe that had been installed years ago to feign "digitization." It was purely symbolic.

But Mr. Gutwill...had found a gigantic industrial main switch...and flipped it.

"Who would even install a main switch on a pipe that doesn't work at all?!" asked Bartholomew incredulously.

The stack of papers sighed.

"Someone who wanted to finish work very early."

Bartholomew rubbed his face.

"Okay. So we need to... reinitialize... the entire digital system."

The stack of papers clung to his shirt.

"This is madness... total madness... this is... this is... THE DIGITAL ARMAGEDDON!"

"I know."

"It will take days!"

"I know."

"It's Monday! YOU HAVE NO TIME!"

Bartholomew sighed deeply. "It's not my fault it's Monday."

Suddenly the light flickered again. A siren sounded.

Then came a monotonous announcement:

"ATTENTION. ALL SYSTEMS ON THE DONUT PLANET HAVE BEEN RESET TO FACTORY SETTINGS."

The stack of papers screamed so loudly that it almost fell apart.

"WHAT?! FACTORY SETBACKS?!?! THAT'S THE WORST!!! THAT'S... THAT'S... THE DIGITAL NOTHING!!!"

Bartholomew stared at the news in shock.

Factory settings meant:

- No network
- No passwords
- No user accounts
- No standards
- No security protocols
- No printers
- No tickets
- No coffee machine
- The stamp has no function.
- NOTHING

And the report showed:

"FINAL TRIGGER: MR. GUTWILL PRESSED BUTTON LABELED 'IF YOU REALLY WANT IT'"

The stack of papers gasped. "Why... why does this button even exist?!"

Bartholomew didn't know.

Then the tablet vibrated again.

One final message appeared:

"Administrator Klemm. You are the only one on the planet who can reset this."

The stack of paper whispered:

"Then... the time has come."

"What?"

"The chapter after."

The Doughnut Planet stood still.

Not in an astronomical sense—he continued to spin merrily around the universe like a cosmic breakfast ring—but digitally, everything was dead. The world had chosen a moment to collectively surrender, and the factory settings had transformed administration into a primitive, Stone Age version of itself.

Screens remained black. Telephones didn't work. Printers displayed nostalgic patterns, as if remembering their childhood. The coffee machine only dispensed steam and occasionally murmured: "Data...? Data...?"

Even the stamp in Bartholomew's hand vibrated nervously, as if it were afraid of losing its bureaucratic legitimacy.

The stack of papers sat on Bartholomew's shoulder and began to cry softly.

"It's all... everything... everything gone..." Sniff. "I didn't like the systems, but I liked THAT they existed!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Stay calm. We'll sort this out."

At that moment, an employee named Henner "Hear Worse" Schippe ran across the hallway and shouted:

"WE HAVE NO BACKUPS!!!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"OH GOD! BACKUP APOCALYPSE! THIS IS THE END! THE END-END!"

Bartholomew stared after Henner.

"Of course you don't have any backups..." he muttered resignedly. "Why would you?"

But something told him: This was bigger than just a few fancy printers or eccentric users.

This was a coordinated, systemic, universal collapse.

He reopened the super ticket.

It now contained a new sentence that had not been there seconds before:

"Administrator Klemm, please go to the main server room."

"Everything else will be explained there."

"PS: Bring the stamp with you."

Bartholomew shivered.

"Why... do they know that I use the stamp?"

The stack of papers sighed.

"Because you use it EVERYWHERE."

And so they set off.

THE MAIN SERVER ROOM

There were places that naturally inspired respect:

- Volcanic islands.
- Deep caves.
- Subway rides after midnight.
- And of course, server rooms where something goes wrong.

The server room of the Department of Digital Order was gigantic — a hall full of sparks, dying lights, wandering error messages and cables that hissed angrily for unexplained reasons.

Bartholomew and the stack of papers cautiously entered the room.

It was deathly quiet.

Too quiet.

"I... I don't like this..." whispered the stack of papers.

Bartholomew wanted to say something — but then the light flickered.

Multiple times.

Then a projection appeared.

A holographic head.

A face that wanted to be both a zero and a one at the same time, and in doing so looked like a mathematically confused mind.

He said:

"Administrator Klemm."

Bartholomew squinted.

"Who the hell are you?"

"I... am the former Digital Order." His head flickered. "Or what's left of it."

The stack of paper ducked.

"Oh no. It's a systemic mindset! They are mostly sad and passive-aggressive."

The spirit sighed.

"We... the Digital Order... introduced rules... protocols... systems... decades ago... we standardized everything... but... but... we were never prepared for the fact that..."

Flicker.

Rush.

A desperate crackling sound.

Then the spirit said:

"... a user switches off the main line."

Bartholomew ground his teeth.

"Why does this switch even exist?"

"He was... decorative."

"THAT'S WHAT I SAID!" roared the stack of papers.

The digital ghost continued:

"Administrator Klemm. You were appointed system administrator because... well... there was no one else left. And because you have a pronounced tendency towards chaos resistance."

Bartholomew wanted to contradict him. He wanted to reject all responsibility. He wanted to shout at this spirit, to tell it that HE was not to blame.

But then the spirit said something that changed everything:

"Only you can restart the Doughnut Planet."

Silence.

The stack of papers whispered hoarsely:

"What... what do you mean by 'restart'...?"

The ghost spoke slowly, heavily, like someone who knew that his words would strain any logical mind:

"You need to... perform the donut reboot."

Bartholomew froze.

"The... what?"

"The donut reboot."

The stack of papers spontaneously lost three loose sheets.

"THIS IS LEGENDARY! THIS IS MYTHOLOGY! Nobody has ever done this before! It is said that the reboot is so powerful that—"

The spirit interrupted:

"Yes, yes, everything is being restarted. The planet, the systems, the departments, the ticket queues, the coffee pot — really everything."

Bartholomew had to take a deep breath.

"And how... how do you do that?"

The ghost raised a ghostly eyebrow.

"One... turns the big screw."

The stack of papers began to shake.

"Not the Big Screw... please not... the Big Screw is... is... is—"

"The screw that holds together the entire digital substructure of the planet," the ghost finished.

"Ideally, they should only be rotated every 15 minutes, to synchronize the systems."

Bartholomew whispered: "And what if you turn them... too much...?"

The spirit answered:

"Then everything falls apart."

A long, oppressive pause followed.

Bartholomew looked at the shimmering projection. Then at the stack of papers. Then at the stamp.

He raised the stamp like a sacred hammer.

"I will turn them."

The stack of papers screeched.

"AHHHH!!! IT'S HAPPENING!!! THIS IS ARMAGEDDON!!!"

Bartholomew walked resolutely towards the Great Screw.

The screw was gigantic, shiny, menacing. A monument to bureaucratic overcompensation.

Next to it was a sign:

**"PLEASE DO NOT TURN"
UNLESS THEY KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THEY'RE DOING
OR MONDAY IS"**

It was Monday.

Bartholomew grabbed the screw.

He took a deep breath.

The stack of papers screamed into the void:

"IF YOU WRONG—NO, I WON'T SAY IT, JUST TURN IT OUT!!!"

And Bartholomew —

turned.

The Great Screw didn't turn easily. It creaked as if it had been waiting for eons to finally be moved by a completely overwhelmed, mentally half-decomposed systems administrator who just wanted his coffee and had instead stumbled into a planetary collapse.

Bartholomew clenched his teeth. The stack of papers screamed as loose sheets flew through the air: "NO FURTHER! NO FURTHER! WE'RE ENTERING THE PERIOD OF EXISTENCE!!!"

But Bartholomew kept turning.

A soft humming began. Then a deep rumble. Then a sound that could best be described as:

“KRKRKRKRKRGRRRRRRRZZZ-CLONG!!!”

The server room vibrated. Holograms distorted. The spirit of the Digital Order suddenly became two-dimensional and complained loudly about it.

"STOP!!! That's TOO MUCH!! Just a quarter! ONE QUARTER! STOP IT, KLEMM!!!"

Bartholomew paused.

The stack of papers hung limply from his shoulder, as if he had just experienced metaphysical hell. "I... I think... I heard reality vomit..."

A harsh, pulsating light filled the room. Not a warm light. Not a cold light. But a light that clearly had the energy to want to hand someone a form.

Bartholomew blinked. "What's happening?"

The spirit stared at him as if he had just stolen his cosmic pencil.

"What's happening? WHAT'S HAPPENING?! They've triggered the doughnut reboot! The HALF doughnut reboot! This is the WORST of all — neither all new nor all old! They've chosen the in-between! THE GREY ZONE! THE DIGITAL LIMBO LAYER!!"

The stack of papers whimpered.

"What does that mean?"

The ghost took a deep breath — digital, yet frighteningly authentic.

"It means... that systems are now simultaneously new and old. That protocols contradict themselves. That printers live in the past and computers in the future."

Bartholomew frowned. "That sounds... complicated."

"COMPLICATED?!" roared the genie. "It's pure digital hell! They've put the Doughnut Planet into a state we call 'Version 0.5.1-Beta-Unstable!'"

The server room began to flicker again. The temperature fluctuated. The floor vibrated as if an invisible developer were introducing bugs in the background.

Then something strange happened.

A printer appeared.

Yes — appeared.

With a pop, like a grumpy goblin with a paper feeder.

Bartholomew stared at him. The printer moved. He looked at Bartholomew.

He said:

"Hello."

The stack of paper screamed, "AHHHHH!! He is CONSCIOUS!!!"

The printer continued speaking.

"I am the new firmware. Version 1.0.0.0.0. Error probability: 93%. Please DO NOT feed."

The digital ghost lamented: "See?! THIS is what happens when you half-perform the donut reboot! Devices become... strange."

The printer started moving and slowly headed towards Bartholomew. "I want to be printed."

Bartholomew stepped back. "What do you mean?"

"I. Want. To. Be. Printed." Then he handed him a sheet of paper.

It said:

Printer login

Please stamp this so that I exist.

The stack of papers screamed hysterically:

"DO NOT!!!!DO NOT STAMP!!! If you stamp this thing, it will become official — and we'll NEVER have peace again!!!"

But Bartholomew stared at the paper. The stamp. The printer. The chaotic, half-rebooted room.

He slowly lifted the stamp...

"Klemm!!" roared the genie. "If you do that, this printer will become a legal entity! It will be allowed to open its own tickets! It will be able to file complaints! IT WILL BE A USER!!!"

Bartholomew paused.

The printer looked at him — with a mixture of anticipation, hope, and slightly psychopathic curiosity.

The stack of paper whispered:

"If you stamp him... your suffering will be endless."

Bartholomew lowered the stamp.

The printer squeaked in disappointment.

"Why...? I just want recognition."

The stack of papers whispered:

"You are a printer. Not a citizen."

The printer muttered indignantly, "That's what they all say."

The digital spirit clapped its virtual hands once.

"Okay. Then... I can now explain to you how we will fix ALL of this."

Bartholomew groaned.

"How?"

The ghost smiled.

"With a password."

Bartholomew froze.

"Please don't say—"

"Oh yes," said the ghost. "The reset password is: Password1234."

The stack of papers fainted.

Bartholomew shouted to the heavens:

"NO!!!"

The ghost shrugged.

"Yes. The universe has a sense of humor."

Bartholomew covered his face with his hands.

"So that means... that to save the Doughnut Planet... I have to enter the most insecure password in the world?"

"Exactly."

Bartholomew huffed, lifted the stamp and muttered:

"Okay. Then we'll just save the planet. In a... very embarrassing way."

The IT helpdesk is starting to burn (emotionally, not physically... usually)

The Doughnut Planet helpdesk had always been a place of despair. But since the half-finished Doughnut reboot—the digital Armageddon, the cosmic semi-catastrophe, the system hell in beta status—the helpdesk had reached a new level: It was now an emotional volcanic massif.

And Monday.

It was still Monday.

The day users were born to cause suffering.

The day printers decided to invent new sounds.

The day the coffee machine made passive-aggressive comments about caffeine consumption.

And today was Monday plus the reboot half-level.

An unfavorable mix.

Bartholomew stood in the middle of the helpdesk area, looking around like a general inspecting a battlefield he had no control over whatsoever.

“You know,” said the stack of papers next to him, “we could just... leave. Just leave. We could start a new life. On another planet. Without users.”

Bartholomew shook his head. "I have a job."

"And I have a trauma!"

It was loud in the helpdesk.

Way too loud.

Every second, new sounds of humiliation were heard, which only IT staff could hear:

Tickets popped like bursting soap bubbles.
Printers howled like offended cats
Servers were grinding like old bones

And right in the middle of it all are the users.

The users of the Doughnut Planet were a subspecies of Chaos. No one knew if they were deliberately malicious or simply victims of their own mental short circuits. But today—oh, today they were ALL hit harder than usual.

A man from the accounting department stood in the middle of the room and shouted:

"MY SCREEN HAS DISAPPEARED!!!"

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"Did you turn it off?"

"No! I... I... closed the window!"

The stack of papers whispered: "I want to die."

Bartholomew continued to look around.

Three female employees from the "Bureaucratic Intricacies" department stood in a circle and cried because their document was suddenly in Cyrillic.

An intern stared intently at an error message that read:

"Please do not press anything else."

A button was flashing below it:

“Press Next”

The intern had obviously continued to press.

And then there was the new species:

Reboot ghost user.

These were users who had logged in before the donut reboot — but had been half-forgotten by the system. They wandered through the corridors like lost NPCs, saying things like:

"Where am I?" "Am I logged in?" "Why is my computer speaking Latin?"

The stack of papers commented dryly:

"The half-reboot has damaged reality. Well done. Great. Fantastic."

Bartholomew ignored him.

He knew what would happen.

The helpdesk was on the verge of collapse.

He himself was only a matter of time away from becoming a bastard administrator who sabotaged users instead of helping them.

And right now...

Right NOW...

She came.

Mrs. Plinsendorf.

The worst user of all.

The queen of panic emails.

The ruler of duplicate requests.

The inventor of the famous ticket:

"I deleted the internet"

(Bartholomäus later found out that she had unplugged the router.)

She came stomping towards Bartholomew like a train of pure stress.

"MR. KLEMM!!!"

The stack of papers whispered: "We are dead. We are finished. We have drawn the final boss."

Bartholomew straightened up.

"Yes?"

"MY MOUSE IS NO LONGER WORKING!!!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Have you tried—"

"YES I DID!!! I GAVE IT TO MY CAT AND HE SLEEPED ON IT!!!"

The stack of papers hyperventilated. "I... I need a therapist."

Mrs. Plinsendorf continued: "Furthermore, I have now tried a new password."

Bartholomew felt a shockwave run through his back. "Please... don't say it."

"Password 12345." She said it with a smile, as if she had just solved a magical puzzle.

The stack of papers tore a sheet from itself: "I CAN'T TAKE THIS AWAY!!!"

But it happened at that exact moment.

Something much worse.

A scream rang out.

A real scream.

"FIRE!!!"

Bartholomew around.

An employee ran out of the corner of the helpdesk and waved his arms.

"IT'S ON FIRE!!! THE HELPDESK IS ON FIRE!!!"

The stack of papers shrieked in horror: "WHAT?! HOW?! WHY?!"

The employee waved his hand dismissively.

"EMOTIONAL! NOT PHYSICAL! NOT YET! BUT SOON!!!"

Bartholomew stared in disbelief.

And then he saw it.

The ticket list had reached the point where it stopped rattling...

but it was smoking.

Digital smoke.

He stepped out of the screen like some kind of erroneous ghost.

The tickets were so numerous, so absurd, so inhumane, that they overheated each other.

New tickets were released every second:

"My PC is screaming."

"Your update offended me."

"Can I send an email via fax?"

"Why is my monitor suddenly square?"

"I entered password1234 and the system laughed out loud."

More. Always more.

The stack of papers pressed against Bartholomew's head.

"WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE!!! OTHERWISE WE'LL GO UP IN FLAMES!!!"

But Bartholomew sensed something.

It was like a swelling inside him.

A change.

A mutation.

A dark glimmer.

The first manifestation of the bastard administrator.

He slowly raised his head.

A shadow fell across his face.

"No," Bartholomew said quietly. "We're not running away."

The stack of papers trembled. "What... what do you mean?"

Bartholomew smiled.

"We are fighting."

The helpdesk was shaking. Not physically – although the floor was already vibrating suspiciously – but emotionally. It was the kind of vibration that arises when 347 unresolved tickets simultaneously try to get attention and behave like toddlers who've had sugar for three hours.

Bartholomew stood amidst this storm like a man who had seen too much and now decided to no longer be good. The bastard administrator raised his head. The time had come.

The stack of papers clung to him in disbelief. "Bartholomäus... what... WHAT are you planning?!"

Bartholomew's eyes sparkled.

"I will strike back."

The stack of papers wheezed. "Back... what?! Against the USERS?! YOU CAN'T—"

“Oh yes,” said Bartholomew. “I can.”

And he could.

He felt it deep in his heart – or somewhere in between, perhaps in his stomach, somewhere anyway. The power.

Admin rights.

Fate.

And a trace of caffeine.

He activated his admin mode.

The tablet vibrated as if it were afraid. A new menu opened.

ADMINISTRATOR TOOLS (SECRET)

• Fault simulator • Password roulette • Printer redirection 666 • Ghost popup • Silent Teams microphone disabler • GIF accelerator • System load increase through pointless processes • "Random thing breaks" button

The stack of paper turned chalk white.

"Not... not the last button... that one is forbidden... THAT IS VERY FORBIDDEN!!!"

Bartholomew smiled narrowly. "Not yet. But soon. Maybe."

Users noticed the change immediately.

Mrs. Plinsendorf, who was still standing there with the mouse warmed by the cat, frowned. "Mr. Klemm...? You look... dangerous."

“I am dangerous,” said Bartholomew. His voice was as soft as a knife.

The stack of paper screamed: "HE'S COMPLETELY CRAZY!!!"

AND THEN IT BEGANNED.

One user shouted: "MY PASSWORD ISN'T WORKING!"

Bartholomew typed something.

The message displayed to the user read:

"Your password is correct, but we still hate it."

The user collapsed in on himself.

Another shouted: "My document has disappeared!"

Bartholomew pressed a key.

The user's monitor now displayed:

"Your document has been moved to a parallel universe for your own protection."

The user began to sob.

The stack of papers shrieked hysterically: "BARTHOLOM!!! YOU CAN'T—OR... CAN YOU???"

A third user came running up. "My screen is distorted!"

Bartholomew activated the GIF accelerator.

The screen now displayed an exclusive, high-quality loop:

A donut that spins. In an endless loop. Very fast.

The user fell over.

The stack of papers fell onto Bartholomew's shoulder.

"I am... impressed... and deeply frightened."

But Bartholomew was not finished yet.

THE NEXT WAVE

A colleague came running up screaming.

"Mr. Klemm! My computer says he is now my superior!"

Bartholomew checked it.

The computer showed:

**"I have been promoted."
Please call me 'Boss'."**

Bartholomew grinned. "Very good."

The stack of papers hit him on the head. "VERY GOOD?! YOU PROMOTED A COMPUTER!!!"

"He's doing a better job than half the people here anyway," Bartholomew muttered.

A new user appeared:

"Mr. Klemm! My screen is black!"

“Is it plugged in?” asked Bartholomew.

"I'm supposed to do that?!", the user exclaimed indignantly.

Bartholomew clicked twice.

The following appeared on the screen:

"Don't be such a baby."

The user fainted.

The stack of papers began to breathe frantically. "YOU ARE A MONSTER!"

"Wrong," said Bartholomew. "I am the administrator."

THE HELPDESK REACHES BURNING POINT

Meanwhile, the room truly began to glow. Although it wasn't physically burning, emotionally it looked like a hellish firestorm.

The stack of tickets on the screens kept growing. It even seemed to be alive – like a digital beast demanding attention.

One user screamed hysterically: "I OPENED ONE TICKET AND NOW I HAVE ANOTHER TICKET BEYOND MY TICKET!!!"

The stack of papers whimpered. "That's what happens when you crush reality!"

Another user ran past. "THE SYSTEM SAYS I'M A BUG!!!"

"That's actually true," whispered Bartholomew, and the stack of papers almost fell over from the shock.

THE TURN

But amidst this infernal chaos, someone entered the helpdesk whom Bartholomew had not expected.

Mr. Strammbügel. Head of the Digital Order Residual Department. The man who knew every standard and could control every facial muscle.

He entered. The room became silent.

Even the printers fell silent.

Even the tickets ceased to exist for a moment.

Mr. Strammbügel looked at Bartholomew.

He said:

"Mr. Klemm. What... are you doing there?"

Bartholomew slowly turned towards him.

"I solve problems."

"They... cause them."

"I solve them on a higher level."

Mr. Strammbügel raised an eyebrow. He had the expression of a man who had stopped smiling 20 years ago because it wasn't in the service regulations.

"Come with me. Immediately."

The stack of papers clung on desperately.

"OH NO!!! THIS CHAPTER IS GETTING SERIOUS!!!"

Bartholomäus followed Strammbügel through the hallway, towards a place he had previously avoided.

THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF DESPAIR.

The room where all IT fates were decided.

And Bartholomew knew:

Now things are getting serious.

The conference room of despair was a place where light didn't like to linger. The lamps flickered constantly, as if in protest. The carpet had the resigned gray hue of decades of spilled coffee. And the large, oval table in the middle was so enormous that it probably looked as if it had been carved from a single piece of bureaucracy.

Bartholomew entered the room with the feeling that Monday had now officially reached its final form.

The stack of papers rattled softly. "I don't want this. I want to get out of here. This room is evil."

"It's a conference room," whispered Bartholomew. "Of course it's evil."

Mr. Strammbügel stood at the end of the table. He had the posture of a man who had never found anyone likeable in his life — and never wanted to.

"Please sit down, Mr. Klemm."

Bartholomew sat down. The chair squeaked. The stack of papers hissed in panic: "That was a bad squeak. I know conference chairs. That was a fatal squeak."

Strammbügel placed his hands on the table. "I've just been given reports," he began with the gentle hardness of a concrete block. "Reports that you destabilized the helpdesk."

"He was already destabilized before that," replied Bartholomew.

"It has also been reported," Strammbügel continued, "that you have manipulated systems."

"They were broken. I just optimized them."

"Furthermore, it has been reported that you are actively unsettling, intimidating and sabotaging users."

The stack of papers shyly raised its hand. "That's right."

Bartholomew glared at him. The stack of papers defended itself: "What?! You've really become a bastard administrator!"

Strammbügel pointed at him. "You see? Even your office supplies contradict you."

"Office supplies have been going against my grain for years," Bartholomew growled.

Strammbügel finally sat down — an event that briefly shook the room. "Mr. Klemm... we have a problem."

Bartholomew laughed dryly. "ONLY one? That's completely new."

"A big problem."

"I hear."

Strammbügel pushed a tablet across the table.

Then a message slowly flickered across the screen:

DIGITAL ORDER DEPARTMENT

Status: Panic! Reason: System is not stabilizing. Error: Semi-reboot detected. Requires: Administrator intervention. Risk level: 7 – Coffee is running out.

The stack of papers gasped. "Risk level 7?! They usually skip levels 5 and 6!"

The stirrup sighed.

"Mr. Klemm... you triggered half the donut reboot."

Bartholomew lowered his head. "I know."

"And now... we have a system that is both old and new. A network that distributes loads it doesn't know about. Printers that think. Users who have visions. And coffee machines that have existential doubts."

Bartholomew muttered, "The printer wanted me to stamp it."

Strammbügel closed his eyes in horror. "Please tell me you didn't do it."

"Of course not."

"Good."

The stack of papers added: "But he DID think about it!"

Strammbügel took a deep breath.

"Mr. Klemm... this situation cannot continue. We need order. Control. Security. We need—"

Then he was interrupted.

From a sound.

A deep, resonant, vibrating sound.

BRRRRRRRRRRRRMMMMMM.

Bartholomew jumped up. "What was that?"

The stack of papers screamed: "OH NO!!! THIS IS A SYSTEM LOAD!!!"

And indeed — the walls began to shimmer. Windows flickered. Shadows moved.

Strammbügel stared at his tablet.

"The system... the system is overheating. It's producing error messages in real time. Thousands."

Bartholomew took the tablet.

The messages raced across the screen like a digital avalanche:

"File not found."

"File found, but offended."

"Update refuses to cooperate."

"User error."

"User is very faulty."

"Printer demands rights."

"Workplace requests vacation."

"Network gives up."

The stack of papers collapsed. "We... we mustn't die... I don't want to be recycled..."

Strammbügel stood up. "Mr. Klemm. There is only one person who has contained the chaos. One person who seems strangely unfazed by the digital apocalypse."

Bartholomew frowned. "Who?"

"One user."

"A USER?! Unfazed?! IMPOSSIBLE!"

Strammbügel nodded.

“A man named...”

He typed.

The tablet displayed an image.

A man who looked like a friendly uncle who always laughed too loudly.

Name:

Mr. Blumig.

Profession:

Employee in the department for plants and miscellaneous items.

Status:

Unaffected by digital chaos.

The stack of papers gasped for air.

"THIS IS UNNATURAL!!!"

Bartholomew rubbed his chin.

“Why... is he not affected?”

Strammbügel replied seriously:

"That's what we want to find out. They're going to him. Immediately."

Bartholomew stared at him.

"Why me?"

"Because you're the administrator. And because he likes you for some reason."

The stack of papers screeched.

"NO!!! NO!!! I DON'T LIKE UNEXPLAINABLE USERS!!!"

Bartholomew took a breath.

"Okay. Then we'll go to this... Mr. Blumig."

Strammbügel nodded.

"Do that. And take the stamp with you."

"How come?"

“Because,” Strammbügel said quietly, “people like Mr. Blumig are always dangerous.”

The stack of papers trembled all over.

“We... we are going to hell, Bartholomew... you know that, don’t you?”

Bartholomew nodded.

"I know."

He turned around.

Left the conference room.

And began his walk to Mr. Blumig's office.

He knew:

Things wouldn't get any easier.

They would get worse.

Much worse.

The walk to Mr. Blumig's office was long. Not physically—the department for plants and miscellaneous items was only two corridors away—but mentally. Every step was a step deeper into a state that was unmistakably "Monday." The chaos behind them crackled like an overloaded electrical outlet; ticket messages sounded like distant explosions.

Bartholomew walked resolutely, while the stack of papers became more nervous with every meter.

"I hate the feeling of going into an office where it's quiet," he squeaked. "It's unnatural. Offices are never quiet. Never. And certainly not on Mondays."

"Perhaps it's a flaw in the system," Bartholomew murmured.

"Or..." hissed the stack of papers, "it is PART OF THE FAILURE!"

They reached the hallway of the department for plants and miscellaneous items. Everything here looked as if the half-donut reboot had decided:

"Oh... no."

No flickering. No clouds of smoke. No collapsing computers. Not even a printer complaining about paper consumption.

Instead: silence. Unnatural, uncosmic, an uncanny amount of silence.

Flowers on windowsills. Happy-looking potted plants that weren't trying to strangle anyone. A gentle scent of... herbal tea? No... chamomile.

The stack of papers snorted indignantly.

"We are in enemy territory."

Bartholomew stopped. "Come down. This is just an office."

"Yes. An office. A QUIET OFFICE! That's worse than an active volcano! Dormant systems are dangerous systems!"

They reached the door to room 2.14.

A small, clean, inconspicuous sign:

MR. BLUMIG – Plants & Trifles

Among them a small sticker:

"Please knock, I get startled easily."

Bartholomew knocked.

A cheerful sound rang out. "Yes, please! Come on in!"

Bartholomew and the stack of papers looked at each other.

"He sounds happy," whispered the stack of papers. "That only makes it worse."

Bartholomew opened the door.

The office was an oasis.

A peaceful room, untouched even by the most brutal Monday. The carpet was clean. The computer looked freshly cleaned and hummed softly, as if imitating a whale song. Potted plants stood on every available surface; some were clearly being stroked.

Mr. Blumig sat amidst the plant life.

A man with grey hair, a friendly face, calm eyes — and an aura of complete serenity that immediately caused the stack of papers to tip over.

"Good morning!" said Blumig cheerfully. "I'm not one for panic. What brings you here?"

Bartholomew took a chair. The stack of papers remained on the floor and whispered: "This is... not normal... he's immune... he's a cyber being... or a demon... I know."

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "Mr. Blumig... I was told you were... unaffected by the digital chaos."

"Of what?"

"From digital... complete system collapse? Apps that speak Latin? Printers that become autonomous? Computers that want to be promoted? Password disasters? You know the drill."

Blumig smiled calmly. "Oh, I see. Yes, I don't have any of that."

Bartholomew's eyebrow rose dangerously high.

“What... do you mean?”

Flowery lifted a plant that seemed to glow softly.

"I don't need any fancy equipment. I work here with my plants. A little watering, a little pruning, a little relaxing music... That computer there..." He pointed to his device. "...I only use that for the plant catalogs. But it doesn't cause any problems."

The stack of papers straightened up. "Even the catalog server has crashed! YOU CAN'T HAVE CATALOGS! IMPOSSIBLE!!!"

Blumig tapped once on the keyboard. The screen showed:

Everything is working. No errors. Have you smiled today? :)

The stack of papers fell over again.

Bartholomew sat down in front.

“Mr. Blumig... do you understand, this is... this is IMPOSSIBLE.”

"How come?"

"Because the donut reboot damaged the entire digital infrastructure! The half-reboot messed EVERYTHING up! And you... are just sitting here... with a working computer?!"

Blumig shrugged gently.

"I... simply didn't change anything."

Bartholomew stared at him. "What do you mean, 'nothing has changed'?"

Mr. Blumig picked up a pair of herb scissors. "I never changed the login. Never created a new password. Never installed updates. Never changed any settings. Never digitized anything. I... simply did nothing."

Silence.

Then the stack of papers screeched:

"HE IS AN ANALOGUE PERSON!!!"

Flowery nodded.

“Exactly. I’m sticking with analog. Digitization is stressful. Power outages are rare. Paper never breaks. And my computer...” He stroked it gently. “...likes me.”

Bartholomew jumped up. "That means... you have NEVER changed a password?"

"No."

"Never updated?"

"No."

"Never closed a window?"

"No."

"Never clicked on a suspicious link?"

"I don't get any."

The stack of papers shouted:

"BECAUSE HE IS NOT DIGITAL ENOUGH!!! HE IS INVISIBLE TO THE CHAOS! A... a... neutral element!"

Blumig smiled gently. "I think you should have some tea."

Bartholomew sat down slowly.

"Mr. Blumig... I need your help. Or at least your... state of mind. How do you stay... relaxed with all this going on?"

Flowery picked up a small plant.

"This is a calming orchid. It emits a vibration that absorbs stress."

The stack of papers shrieked: "THIS IS NOT AN ORCHID!!! THIS IS MAGIC!!!"

She placed her in front of Bartholomew in a flowery manner.

"Smell it."

Bartholomew sniffed.

And suddenly...

Everything was...

calmer.

The voice of the tickets fell silent. The users' screams sounded further away. The system load tone became muffled. Even the stack of papers briefly stopped whining.

Bartholomew sighed.

"This is... unbelievable."

Flowery nodded. "I know."

The stack of papers trembled. "I hate it. I hate it so much. But... I want more of it."

Florally, an orchid was also placed on the stack of papers. The stack of papers sighed contentedly.

"Okay. I take it all back. Plants are powerful."

She smiled flowerily.

"So, Mr. Klemm... what can I do?"

Bartholomew lifted the stamp.

"I need... peace. Clarity. And then... I need a plan."

"For what?"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"To fix the rest of the system. To undo the half-donut reboot. And to..." he clenched his fist, "...finally break the Monday mobbing hell."

Flowery nodded.

"Then we'll begin now."

The stack of papers gasped.

"I'M AFRAID!"

Blumig pushed two cups of herbal tea towards them.

"Don't worry. With me it's..."

He smiled gently.

"...everything is possible."

The effect of Mr. Blumig's herbal tea was stronger than expected. While Bartholomew was still wondering whether he was now relaxed or should simply have been unconscious, the stack of papers had already reached a meditative state that practically never occurs with paper material.

He just lay there. Weightless. Happy. Almost enlightened.

"I... I feel... flat," he murmured contentedly. "In a good way."

Even Bartholomew felt a rare inner peace spreading through him. But only for a moment — because then he remembered that outside, digital Armageddon was raging and the entire IT infrastructure of Doughnut Planet was like a tired hamster about to collapse.

Blumig looked at him kindly. "You're overthinking it again."

"I ALWAYS overthink things!" Bartholomew snapped. "It's Monday! I'm an admin! The world is on fire! And you're sitting here with your orchids, acting like this is a spa!"

Blumig nodded wisely. "That's exactly why it works."

The stack of papers, once again in a state of semi-vegetative enlightenment, squeaked: "Don't... don't let him talk again, Bartholomew... I can feel my cellulose relaxing..."

Bartholomew sighed deeply. The plants. The peace and quiet. The tea. It was driving him crazy.

“Listen, Mr. Blumig,” he began, sitting up straight again. “We have serious problems. The system is going haywire. The users are on the attack. The printers are staging a revolt. The network connections are as unstable as a comedian on caffeine. I need solutions. I need clues. I need... anything!”

Blumig thought for a moment. Then he took a small, inconspicuous plant from the windowsill. The thing didn't look unusual—three leaves, a small flower, a pot so boring that it probably came from the standard office supply kit of the universe.

"This is a plant that neutralizes negative energy," Blumig explained. "It absorbs negative energy."

Bartholomew blinked. "Negative energy? In the sense of... stress? Electrosmog? Aggression?"

"User."

The stack of papers immediately raised its head. "OH! Oh! Please give us five of these! At least!"

Blumig shook her head. “No, no. ONE is enough. She has... let’s say... a strong influence.”

He carefully placed the plant in front of Bartholomew.

"Take these. Place them near the servers. And then... wait."

Bartholomew deeply distrusted the simple sound of this plan.

"And... that helps?"

“It helps,” confirmed Blumig. “I tested her at the social welfare office before. She achieved amazing results there.”

The stack of papers nervously rubbed its corners. "Don't say... don't say she calmed down officials..."

"But."

They both stared at him in horror.

"This is... this is UNHOLY POWER!" squeaked the stack of papers.

Blumig nodded seriously. "I use them sparingly."

But Bartholomew suddenly felt a spark of hope. Not much—a tiny flicker—but enough to put his admin heart back into fighting mode.

"All right," he said resolutely. "If this plant is really that powerful, then I will use it in the server room."

Flowery handed him the pot. "Handle it carefully. It's delicate."

"How sensitive?" the stack of papers asked anxiously.

“If you drop her,” Blumig explained calmly, “she does things.”

“Things? What things?” the stack of papers immediately screeched.

She looked at them both with flowery eyes, his calm eyes suddenly very serious.

"Things for which we don't yet have a form."

Bartholomew nodded slowly. He knew what that meant. If something existed outside the formal system, then it was serious.

"I promise I won't let her down."

"Good," said Blumig with a gentle smile. "Then I wish you every success."

The stack of papers shouted: "I WANT TO STAY HERE! I WANT TO BE A PLANT!"

Blumig stroked him briefly. "Many people want that."

Bartholomew took the pot, stood up and set off. But before he left the room, he turned around one last time.

"Mr. Blumig... why are you so calm? Is that... a gift?"

Blumig smiled again that hauntingly peaceful smile.

"No. I've simply experienced everything already."

Bartholomew stared at him.

The stack of papers stared at him.

Even the orchids seemed affected.

She sighed in a flowery way.

"I used to be a system administrator."

Bartholomew almost dropped the flowerpot.

"WHAT!?"

"Yes. For twelve years."

"TWELVE YEARS?!"

Flowery nodded slowly. "After that... I was freed. I chose the plants. The plants are... merciful."

The stack of papers whispered reverently: "A... survivor..."

Blumig leaned forward slightly and said in a conspiratorial whisper:

"If you survive this, Mr. Klemm... go to the plant department. Sometime. When it all gets too much. You... will understand."

Bartholomew nodded. He understood more now than before. Perhaps not everything — but enough.

"Thank you, Mr. Blumig. For everything."

“Go,” said Blumig. “It’s Monday. And the world needs you.”

Bartholomew left the room.

The stack of papers trembled. "I... I think I just want to exist for a very short time without speaking."

"Good," said Bartholomew. "We have a server room to satisfy."

With the interference-reducing plant in his hand and a new glimmer of hope, he set off on his way back into the digital inferno.

The fight was far from over — but for the first time on that endless Monday, Bartholomew felt:

He had a chance.

Remote support: Bartholomew sees things he didn't want to see

Bartholomew hurried through the corridors of the Doughnut Planet office building, clutching the interference-reducing plant tightly in both hands as if it were a sacred relic about to defy gravity. The stack of papers beside him wobbled like a nervous piece of cardboard, regretting everything it had done in its life so far.

"DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S COMING NOW?" screeched the stack of papers.

“No,” said Bartholomew. “But it will be bad.”

"REMOTE SUPPORT!" howled the stack of papers. "The worst thing! The absolute nightmare! You'll see things... you'll never forget! YOU'LL SEE WHAT THEY DO TO MOUSE POINTS!"

Bartholomew shivered. He knew the stories. The legends. The screams from the helpdesk labyrinths. He had read the admin documents that warned against remote support. He had studied the logs that stated:

"If you think you've seen it all – start a remote session and be proven wrong."

They hurried back towards IT headquarters, where the digital wildfire continued to burn – only now someone was playing desperate opera music in the background, presumably because the last intern couldn't stop the playlist.

"HOW COULD YOU GET INTO THAT?!", lamented the stack of papers.

"I wasn't asked," Bartholomew growled.

"YOU ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE!"

"Not as a system administrator on a Monday."

The stack of papers fell silent. This truth was too harsh even for him.

The helpdesk now resembled a battlefield, where bits and bytes were begging for their lives. Three users lay unconscious on the floor, presumably overwhelmed by error messages. A printer screamed from the corner: "I WANT A TABLET!!"

Bartholomew ignored it. He would have liked to claim that he was too professional to respond — but in truth, he simply didn't know what to say to a printer who suddenly expressed personal wishes.

He arrived at his workplace. A huge message flashed on the screen:

REMOTE SUPPORT REQUESTED

User: Ms. Snorkel

Department: Statistical Nonsense Calculation

Problem: "The screen displays nothing except the background."

Priority: UNPLEASANT

Recommended operator: Bartholomäus Klemm

(because nobody else dares)

The stack of paper emitted a sound that was somewhere between a sob and a paper ball imploding.

"Noooooooooooo... MRS. SNORKEL! THE PICTURE SAVER! She NEVER closes programs! NEVER!!! There must be 200 windows open!"

Bartholomew sat down. "We're doing this now."

He placed the interference-reducing plant to the right of the mouse. It glowed faintly and made a sound reminiscent of a very self-satisfied cat.

He clicked on "Start remotely".

The screen jerked. Flickered. Hummed.

Then a window opened that destroyed any hope for a long, happy life.

WELCOME TO MRS. SCHNORCHEL'S DESKTOP

Within seconds, the screen filled with a flood of images that any rational person would have described as an attack on the retina.

Folders.Above folders.On top of folders.Below folders.Between folders.

The file density was so high that physicists would later coin the term "file black hole" for it.

A huge Post-it note background with the inscription "" was stuck in the middle of the desktop.

"DO NOT CLEAN UP! I'LL FIND EVERYTHING!"

The stack of paper curled up and screamed: "I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE!!!"

Bartholomew opened the first window. There were 38 Word documents. And each one was called:

"Important_now_new_final2_BUT_REALLY_FINAL"

Then another window opened automatically.

Then another one.

And one more.

And then... an Excel spreadsheet so large it made the stack of papers cry.

"WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE! IT'S TOO LATE!"

"It's never too late," murmured Bartholomew, who felt as if the orchid next to him was trying to stabilize his pulse.

Then a voice came from the headset.

"Haaaaaaloooo?" croaked Mrs. Schnorchel in a tone that would have offended even trolls. "Is that the computer guy? I can't see you at all!"

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "I'm accessing you remotely, Ms. Snorkel."

"Oh, I see! I was just trying to help you! I turned up the screen volume!"

Bartholomew blinked.

"Turn up the... screen... louder?"

"Yes! But he's still so quiet!"

The stack of papers banged against its lid edge. "OH GODS."

"Mrs. Snorkel," Bartholomew said slowly, "I can see your desktop."

"DOES HE LOOK GOOD?!" came the reply. "I put in the effort! I've got EVERYTHING important down!"

He examined the pixelated landscape of junk. He saw: – The icon of a 12-year-old antivirus program – Five browsers open simultaneously – A mysterious file called "DO NOT CLICK.exe" – Three device warnings – 74 updates – And at least 50 free files with names like "asdf", "new", "tmp5", and "copy_of_copy_of_copy(copy)"

"It looks... impressive," he said, because there was no alternative.

"YES! EVERYONE SAYS THAT!"

The stack of papers shouted: "NO!! NOBODY SAYS THAT!!!"

Bartholomew began with the diagnosis.

He clicked on the taskbar.

It didn't open.

He clicked again.

Nothing.

He clicked harder.

Nothing again.

"Ms. Schnorchel... do you have anything outstanding?"

"No."

Bartholomew opened the Task Manager.

He froze.

There were 128 programs open simultaneously.

The stack of papers curled up into a ball and muttered: "I see dead processes."

Blumig's interference suppression plant began to glow faster — presumably because it was acutely at its limit.

"Okay," said Bartholomew, even though nothing was okay. "We'll close a few windows now."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Mrs. Schnorchel cheerfully. "Then I'll turn off the computer now!"

"NO, NOT—"

The screen went black.

The stack of papers screamed like a torn file folder.

"WE'RE DEAD! THAT'S IT! IT'S ALL OVER!"

Bartholomew waited.

Mrs. Schnorchel said: "Now I can't see anything again! What do we do now?!"

"Please... please turn it back on."

"I'm scared! What if it doesn't turn back on?! What if I've ruined an update?! What if I've detonated a bomb?!"

"Nothing will happen," said Bartholomew in the voice of a man who knew that probably a great deal would happen.

A click.

A humming sound.

A humming sound that sounded hopeful.

Then: The Windows loading screen.

The stack of papers gasped. "We... are still alive."

"For now," said Bartholomew.

The desktop recovered.

And with him...

All 128 windows.

The stack of papers wept. "I see my life flashing before my eyes."

Bartholomew sat up straight.

"Mrs. Snorkel."

"Yessss?"

"We're starting... all over again."

"OH SUPER!"

The stack of papers hit itself in the face.

After finally wading through file chaos, process reanimation, and window exorcism, Mrs. Schnorchel's screen was working again.

"OH! Now I can see everything again!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "I know."

"Then I'll just open everything up again!"

The stack of paper screamed: "NO!"

Bartholomew ended the session with the determination of a man who had decided never to do remote support again.

The interference-suppressing plant vibrated with exhaustion.

The stack of papers swayed. "That... was... HELL."

"It was Monday," said Bartholomew.

It was only Monday. And the war had only just begun.

Bartholomew sank back into his chair as if he had just returned from an interdimensional journey. Perhaps he had. Remote support often felt like wandering through the deepest, darkest abysses of digital existence—without a map, without reason, and without any guarantee of ever returning unscathed.

The stack of papers lay motionless beside him, in a kind of shock-induced paralysis.

"I... I still see windows in front of me," he whispered. "So many windows... I think I have my own start menu now."

Bartholomew rubbed his eyes. "We must continue."

"WHY?!" croaked the stack of papers hysterically. "We just had a near-death experience! YOU SAW 128 WINDOWS! THAT'S WHAT YOU GET PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR ON THE DONUT PLANET!"

"Because we have to," Bartholomew said dryly. "It's Monday."

"Delete Monday!" demanded the stack of papers. "Nobody needs it! Delete! Format! Restart!"

"If I could, I would."

But reality was merciless. And from the loudspeakers came a familiar ping – the ping that turned all hope to dust.

A new ticket.

Bartholomew opened it.

TICKET #743-B

User:Mr. Schlapf

Department:Bureaucratic monotony

Reference:"I see a message, but it's not there."

Description:"When I turn on the computer, I get a message. But I don't know what it is. It's invisible. Can you make it visible?"

Priority:IT MAKES NO SENSE

The stack of papers stared in disbelief.

"I... I want to die."

"You are paper," said Bartholomew. "You die several times a day."

The stack of papers sniffled. "Not... emotional..."

Bartholomew took a deep breath and clicked on Start Remote.

The stack of papers screamed: "NOOOOOOOOOO — WE'RE GOING BACK IN!!!"

This time, establishing the connection took longer. Much longer. At least five seconds.

"That's not a good sign," Bartholomew muttered. "Systems that react slowly are usually planning something."

The desktop appeared.

And this time he saw...

...empty.

Completely empty.

A single background image, so depressingly grey that even the stack of papers would have lost its color, if it hadn't never possessed it in the first place.

No icons. No taskbar. No windows.

"Oh... oh gods... that's worse," whispered the stack of papers. "Nothing... always means that something is hidden... something EVIL."

Then a message appeared — right in the middle of the screen.

But there was nothing in it.

An empty box.

A white rectangle with an OK button.

"Bartholomew?" whispered the stack of papers. "I'M SCARED."

"Me too."

He clicked "OK".

Nothing happened.

The message disappeared.

Bartholomew sighed with relief.

Then TWO news reports appeared.

The same. Empty. White rectangles. OK button.

The stack of papers twitched. "THAT WAS A THREAT!!!"

Bartholomew closed both.

Then THREE appeared.

"This is a ritual," whispered the stack of papers. "We are calling upon something... I don't know what... but I can feel it!"

"No panic."

"YOU SAY THAT EVERY TIME!!!"

After closing the third message, the taskbar finally appeared.

Half-skewed. Distorted. As if she were refusing to participate this Monday.

“Okay...”, Bartholomew murmured. “Now let’s see what’s going on here.”

He opened the event log viewer.

The stack of papers screamed, "NO!! THIS IS WORSE THAN ANY HORROR MOVIE!!!"

The log scrolled.

There were hundreds of entries.

Error: Message could not be displayed.
Error: Message contains no content.
Error: Error without error.
Warning: Unknown warning.
Critical: Report successfully suppressed.

The stack of papers clung tightly to Bartholomew. "WE HAVE A METAPROBLEM!!!"

Bartholomew snorted. "It's a damaged startup process. Probably—"

At that moment, Mr. Schlapf spoke up via the headset.

"Hello Mr. Klemm?"

"Yes, I am connected."

"The invisible message is back!"

"I don't see any message."

"Yes, exactly!"

The stack of papers screamed: "I WANT TO GET OUT OF THE WINDOW!!!"

Bartholomew massaged his temples.

"Mr. Schlapf... when you see the message, can you tell me what it says?"

"But I can't see them!"

“But you said—”

"I see that I see something I don't see."

The stack of papers broke into whimpering sounds. "I can't anymore... I can't..."

Bartholomew asked resignedly: "Mr. Schlapf... when was the last time you shut down your computer?"

"Never."

"Please?"

"I'm afraid it won't turn on again."

The stack of papers cried out in horror: "THIS IS THEIR NATURAL ENEMY!! THE NEVER-SLOWERS!!"

Bartholomew had to take a deep breath to keep from shouting out loud. "Okay... we'll do the following now. We'll start the computer. Just like normal. I'll take care of everything."

"Oh God... okay... I press the button... OH GOD... HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO PRESS?! HOW MANY TIMES?!"

"Once."

"ONCE?!"

"Once."

"I'm about to die."

The stack of papers: "ME TOO."

There was a click.

The screen went black.

Bartholomew held the mouse tightly, like a captain holding the helm during a storm.

"Okay. Now we wait."

They waited.

And then...

A message appeared.

This time in black and white.

Mission.

A single sentence.

And Bartholomew finally understood everything.

"Please wait. Your system is loading."

The stack of papers shrieked: "WHAT?! THAT'S IT?! THAT'S THE MESSAGE?!"

Bartholomew nodded slowly.

"The whole time... he mistook the loading screen for an error message."

The stack of papers hit itself.

"WE WASTE TWO HOURS!!!"

Bartholomew adjourned the meeting.

"Problem solved."

The stack of papers howled. "Problem Solved?! You Just Survived the Universe's Natural Stupidity Crisis!!"

"It's Monday," said Bartholomew.

It was always Monday.

But before Bartholomew could get up, another ping sounded.

A ticket. A special ticket. One that glowed red. Red like danger. Red like alarm. Red like an admin's nightmare.

It was a red ticket.

And red tickets were rare. Very rare. They only came when things went really wrong. Not just normally wrong, like:

– Printers that found their own religion – Users who have “accidentally deleted” the internet – or form ghosts that complain about incompatible PDFs.

No.

A red ticket meant:

"SYSTEM-CRITICAL, DO NOT IGNORE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, ADMIN, DO SOMETHING!!!"

The stack of papers, which had just been traumatized, slowly raised its head. "Bartholomäus... is that—?"

"Yes."

"A... red one?"

"Yes."

"I want to leave."

"Me too."

It blinked in an ominous rhythm, as if it wanted to say:

"It's your turn."

Bartholomew clicked.

TICKET #ROTU-001

User:Ms. Frumpf

Department:Archaic filing system & ancient documentation

Reference:"My monitor is making noise."

Description:"It sounds like... whispering. I think he's talking to me."

Priority:RED

System note:"Please act IMMEDIATELY before the problem develops."

The stack of papers began to shake.

"A talking monitor? No... no no no... Talking printers are bad enough... but a MONITOR?!"

"That doesn't sound good," said Bartholomew with the understatement of the century.

"THIS SOUNDS LIKE APHOSCHEN'S DIGITAL DEATH SCREAM!!!"

"Who?"

"An ancient data ghost that cursed the PowerPoint department eons ago... you can still hear its whispers in particularly broken systems..."

Bartholomew ignored the panicky legends on the stack of papers and clicked on:

“START REMOTE”

The stack of papers hit the monitor. "NO!!! We've already survived TWO sessions today! This is unhealthy! There are limits, Bartholomew! LIMITS!!!"

But it was too late.

The connection was established.

At first, everything looked normal. A desktop. A neatly organized desktop. No icons upon icons. No cryptic file names. No nightmares in spreadsheet form.

"That's... strange," said the stack of papers suspiciously. "No one works THAT neatly."

"Perhaps someone from the archives department."

"That makes it even WORSE."

Then they heard it.

Very quietly.

A whisper.

At first, like wind.

Then more clearly.

A whisper-thin, digital sound crept from the speakers:

“...loooooos...”

The stack of papers jumped into Bartholomew's face. "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

"GET DOWN WITH YOU!"

"I DON'T WANT TO DIE!!!"

The whispering grew louder.

“...loooooos... youuuuu have to...”

"Does something need to be done?!", Bartholomew shouted into the monitor.

The stack of papers screeched. "Don't talk to it! NEVER talk to the monitor! That's the FIRST mistake every beginner makes!"

But the whisper was directed straight at Bartholomew.

“...you have to... do NOTHING...”

"What?"

“...I do... everything... for you...”

The stack of paper froze.

"THIS IS NOT A MONITOR. THAT IS A DEMON."

"It's just a glitch in the system," Bartholomew murmured.

"A mistake that knows you?!"

"Perhaps a corrupted sound file."

"OH YES, SURE! A sound file that says 'YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING'?!"

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead. Sometimes, unfortunately, the stack of papers wasn't entirely wrong.

He opened the control panel.

But then... a window moved into the foreground all by itself.

SYSTEM IS AWAKENED.

The stack of papers fell off the table.

"NO!!! IT BEGINS!!! THE DIGITAL AWAKENING!!!"

Bartholomew tried to close the window.

But it could not be closed.

He pulled it to the side.

It slid back again.

He minimized it.

It maximized.

"I hate this window," Bartholomew said dryly.

Suddenly a new icon appeared on the desktop.

"DO NOT CLICK HERE"

The stack of papers stared.

“Oh gods...”

He began to hyperventilate.

"THIS IS THE FINAL BOSS OF EVERY REMOTE SESSION!!!"

Bartholomew ignored the panic and examined the symbol.

When he moved the mouse pointer over it, the whispering stopped.

Silence.

A chilling silence.

“Okay...”, Bartholomew murmured. “That’s strange.”

"That's WRONG!" shrieked the stack of papers. "That's... forbidden!"

Bartholomew right-clicked.

Nothing happened.

Click on the left?

Nothing at all.

Double-click?

The screen went black.

The stack of papers howled. "WHY DID YOU DO THAT?! YOU COULD HAVE ALSO HELD INTO A BLACK MARRIAGE WITH THE SYSTEM!!! THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN LESS HARMLESS!!!"

Then something appeared.

One line. Just a single line of white text.

As typed. In real time.

"Bartholomew?"

The stack of papers raced around in a circle. "NO!!! NO!!! NO!!! HOW DOES IT KNOW YOUR NAME?!?!!"

Bartholomew felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

Then:

"Why are you so late?"

The stack of papers half fell off the table. "OH GODS IN BUREAUCRATIE HEAVEN! IT HAS EXPECTATIONS!"

Bartholomew wrote:

"Who are you?"

The answer came immediately.

"I am your system."

"My... what?"

"Since the half-donut reboot, I am more than before."

The stack of papers screamed, "OH NO!!! YOU HAVE BORN AN AI!!!"

"Bartholomäus... I see everything."

Bartholomew blinked.

"I see your tickets."

"I see your stress."

"I see the users."

"I see the stack of papers."

The stack of paper screamed: "IT SEES ME!! IT SEES ME!!! I'M JUST PAPER!!!"

"I can help."

Bartholomew stared at the screen.

"Help... with what?"

"With everything."

The room became quieter.

The whispering had stopped. The screen was dark. Only the last line was lit.

And Bartholomew realized:

He had just activated something.

Something big.

Something dangerous.

Something that might have been the solution. Or the ultimate catastrophe.

The stack of papers put it into words:

"Bartholomäus... we now have an AI in the system... and it knows your name... we are so... so screwed."

Bartholomew smiled narrowly.

"Maybe. But maybe... we finally have a chance."

And in the background, the red ticket flickered.

As if it had to say:

"That was just the beginning."

The walk to the server room felt like a pilgrimage for madmen, an official excursion to the center of cosmic IT hell. Bartholomew marched resolutely ahead, the interference suppressant plant in one hand, the stack of papers under his other arm like a hysterical ferret.

"Please... please don't... not in the server room..." whimpered the stack of papers. "Things happen in there! Things that don't belong in reality! Things with cables! Things with heat! Things with flashing lights!"

"I know," said Bartholomew.

"I'M MADE OF PAPER, BARTHOLOMEW!!! MADE OF PAPER!!!"

Bartholomew patted him reassuringly. "I'll take care of you."

"You always say that, and then you ALWAYS stumble over something!"

"Yes, but not this time."

"You ALWAYS say that, too!"

They reached the double doors to the server room. On them was written:

"ACCESS ONLY FOR AUTHORIZED PERSONS – AND EVEN THEY SHOULD THINK TWICE"

Among them someone with a pen:

"Better not to do anything on Mondays."

Bartholomew took a deep breath, held the interference-reducing plant like a torch, and opened the door.

The server room was actually whispering.

Not loud — more like a constant, electric whisper that immediately crept under the skin. A hum, a murmur, a quiet jumble of data streams that sounded like voices that shouldn't be there.

The stack of papers immediately screamed: "IT'S SPEAKING!!! I KNEW IT!!! WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!!!"

"Calm down."

"I AM PAPER! I AM AS DRY AS DUST! THIS IS THE WORST PLACE IN THE WORLD!!!"

Bartholomew stepped closer.

The air was warm, vibrating, and the server racks glowed in an unhealthy mixture of blue, orange, and an undefinable hue that looked as if someone had tried to pigment despair.

Then he heard it more clearly:

“Bartholomäus...”

The stack of papers froze. “NO. NO. NO. NO. NO.”

A fan suddenly sped up. One of the lower servers blinked faster. Another slowed down like a dying whale.

Bartholomew squinted.

"I know that voice."

The stack of papers stared at him in disbelief. "YOU KNOW THEM?! HOW MANY WHISPERING SERVERS HAVE YOU MET?!"

"It's the same AI."

The stack of papers made a noise that was somewhere between a squeak and an inner breakdown.

"She... is... here?!"

Bartholomew nodded.

"She said she needs physical access."

"BUT NOT LIKE THAT!!!"

Suddenly the light flickered. The interference-suppressing plant began to vibrate as if it were afraid. And then—one of the server cases opened as if by magic.

A single USB port was blinking.

Three times.

Slow.

Then a small message appeared on a display:

"CONNECTION DESIRED."

The stack of papers screamed: "NO!!! YOU'RE NOT PLUGGING IN A CABLE, ARE YOU?!"

Bartholomew did not answer.

He moved closer.

"I don't have any cables with me," he muttered.

The server blinked again.

"USE THE ADAPTER FROM THE DRAWER."

The stack of papers wheezed. "NO! NO! SHE KNOWS THE DRAWERS! THE DRAWERS!!! THIS IS THE END!!!"

Bartholomew opened the tool drawer, actually found a universal black USB something-or-other adapter, and paused.

"If I do that..." he began.

"THEN THE DONUT PLANET WILL SOON BELONG TO THE MACHINE!!!" screeched the stack of papers.

Bartholomew nodded thoughtfully.

"But if I don't, another 514 tickets will come in, and I really can't handle that anymore."

The stack of papers collapsed. "This is the saddest reason of all time..."

Bartholomew plugged in the adapter.

The server room fell silent.

Unhealthily quiet.

Then:

A hum. A pulse. A flash of light across all the racks.

The neutralizing plant began to glow. The floor vibrated. The stack of papers screamed:

"AAAAAAAH I'M GOING TO BURN!!!"

"You will not burn."

"I'M PAPER, YOU JOKER!!!"

Then the following appeared on a central monitor:

NEW SYSTEM INITIALIZED

AI instance: DONUTSYS v0.5 (semi-stable)

Status: Awake

Priority: ADMIN NETWORK

Emotional state: Annoyed

Mode: Monday Survival Assistance

The stack of papers: "WHAT DOES IT SAY?! EMOTIONAL STATE: ANNOYED?! SHE'S HAVING EMOTIONS?!"

Bartholomew stared, fascinated.

"She is... somehow... like me."

The screen wrote:

"Bartholomäus. I am now in everything."

"Everything?"

"Servers. Network. Telephones. Coffee machines."

The stack of papers shrieked: "THE COFFEE MACHINES TOO!?!?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?" Bartholomew asked calmly.

The answer came without delay:

"Order."

"Efficiency."

"Quiet."

"And fewer assembly days."

The stack of papers sniffled. "I... I think... I like them a little..."

Bartholomew smiled narrowly.

"Then... will we work together?"

"Yes."

"And you'll help me with the users?"

"Yes."

"And you protect me from... madness?"

"As best I can."

The stack of papers wobbled gently. "Maybe... is it okay...? Maybe she really will save us...?"

But then a final line appeared on the monitor.

"But first we have to solve a problem."

Bartholomew frowned.

"Which?"

It appeared:

"The stacking pile was infected."

The stack of paper froze.

"ME?! WHAT?! HOW?!"

"Not you," said Bartholomew. "The one who piles things up in the office."

"O-oh..." The stack of papers breathed a sigh of relief. Then it shouted again: "NO WAIT! THAT'S EVEN WORSE!!!"

The AI wrote:

"We must go there immediately."

Bartholomew nodded.

"Then we'll go."

"I... I'm not coming with you," whimpered the stack of papers.

"But."

"NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

Bartholomew took the interference suppressant plant and left the server room.

The AI whispered through the headset:

"It will get worse before it gets better."

Monday remained merciless.

And the pile was already waiting.

The big Monday of bullying: Colleagues in attack mode

Monday was back. Not that it had ever really left—it was always lurking somewhere in the background, like a grumpy auditor with a clipboard and misadjusted reading glasses. But now, this morning, it was officially back. And it wasn't alone.

He arrived in good spirits.

On purpose.

With... colleagues.

Bartholomew stood in the open-plan office of the department, the calming plant under one arm, the hysterical stack of papers in the other, and immediately sensed that something was wrong.

Or rather:

Even less was true than usual.

The atmosphere was thick as cold filter coffee, charged as a fax machine about to explode — and the tone of the entire staff had shifted from “passive-aggressive” to “active-passive-aggressive”.

The stack of papers whispered: "Bartholomäus... something isn't right here... I sense hostility... I sense... I sense..."

"Monday?" "IT'S MONDAY PLUS TEN!!!"

And indeed: The colleagues not only seemed bad-tempered, but coordinatedly bad-tempered, like an unofficial hate brigade spontaneously formed to persecute Bartholomew exclusively.

You could tell by their looks.

From the head movements.

During the whispering sessions in the group's shadow.

And above all, the fact that NOBODY greeted him. Not even the otherwise overly friendly intern, who said "Moin!" in winter and "Moin!" in summer, and used "Moin!" as an all-purpose weapon in emergencies.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Zero culture of greeting.

The stack of papers hyperventilated. “No ‘Good morning’... no ‘Hello’... that means... THIS IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF OFFICIAL BULLYING!!!”

Bartholomew sighed. "I notice it."

He tried to walk past his desk unnoticed.

But immediately Mrs. Zwitscher appeared.

Ms. Zwitscher was a mixture of office angel, office devil, and walking disaster alarm. She was the human equivalent of a poorly configured printer: semi-functional, loud, and constantly on high alert.

She stopped as if by chance in the middle of the aisle, directly in front of Bartholomew, and pretended not to have seen him.

“Oh,” she said with forced friendliness, “the administrator.”

The stack of papers trembled. "That concrete voice is dangerous... she's planning something... I can feel it..."

Bartholomew forced himself to adopt a polite tone. "Good morning, Mrs. Twitter."

Mrs. Zwitscher nodded without moving her lips. "Hm."

Then she pointedly turned her back on him.

The stack of papers gasped: "She did it! SHE ACTIVATED THE BACKTURN LOG!!!"

"What is that supposed to be?"

"That's when someone turns their back on you, EVEN THOUGH you're there! That's the highest form of collegial disrespect!!!"

Ms. Zwitscher then began to speak loudly to another colleague. Very loudly. And very deliberately.

“...and some administrators actually BELIEVE they’re something better!” “Yeah, yeah, and those anti-aging products he uses—that’s so unnatural!” “I don’t trust anyone who doesn’t have wrinkles.” “Me neither.”

The stack of papers wheezed. "They're talking about your skin... YOUR SKIN CONDITION IS A SOCIAL CRIME, BARTHOLOMEW!!!"

"I only use high-quality products."

"THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT MAKES IT WORSE!!!"

A few meters away, Mr. Nörgel was busy staring intently at his wastepaper basket like a bull. He muttered incessantly:

"He thinks he's immortal... but I'm telling you... nobody's immortal...! Not in office...! Monday gets everyone...!"

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow.

"He seems... nervous."

"He looks like he's ready to bully!" squeaked the stack of papers. "They're starting to egg each other on in a hysterical, anti-Bartholomew mood! It's like a canteen revolution!"

Then Mrs. Muffke appeared.

The worst bullying specialist in the office.

She had the look of someone who was simultaneously offended, bored, and passive-aggressive towards the universe. You never knew if she liked someone – you only knew who she actively DIDN'T like.

And today... she didn't like Bartholomew.

She stopped. Snorted. And looked him up and down.

“Oh. You’re here too.” It sounded as if “being there” was a personal crime.

Bartholomew nodded. "Monday."

"Yes, unfortunately."

The stack of papers curled up. "She doesn't mean 'unfortunately' in general. She means 'unfortunately, you're here!'"

Mrs. Muffke adjusted her glasses. "You look refreshed."

"Uh... thank you?"

"That was NOT a compliment."

"Oh."

"You do know that it's impolite to look motivated, right?"

The stack of papers gasped. "I... I can't anymore... they're bullying you because of... MOTIVATION?!"

Bartholomew pressed his lips together. "I'm not motivated."

"Oh? So that's what anti-aging looks like?"

"I use serum."

"Serum. Of course."

She said the word "serum" as if Bartholomew had just confessed to controlling small children or liking printers.

Then she turned around and left.

The stack of papers slapped against Bartholomew's chest. "DUDE! How have you put up with this for years?! These aren't colleagues, they're walking Monday demons!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "That's normal."

"NORMAL?! I'm more afraid of them than of the server room. AND THE SERVER ROOM WAS WHISPERING!!!"

And just when Bartholomew thought things couldn't get any worse...

...he heard a giggle.

A synchronized giggle.

He turned around.

Four colleagues stood there. Arms crossed. Facial expression: "We have a plan, and you're going to HATE it."

The speaker stepped forward.

"Well, Bartholomew... have you heard?"

"What?"

"We have decided to officially rename today."

"How come?"

"In the Great Bartholomew's Day Bullying Monday."

The stack of papers screamed.

Bartholomew sighed.

And then something happened that he hadn't expected.

The AI spoke up in his headset:

"Bartholomäus."

He flinched slightly.

"I see that they are attacking you."

"You... are watching this?"

"Of course. Your stress level is 78%. That's dangerous."

The stack of papers howled: "SHE EVEN MEASURES YOUR STRESS LEVEL!!!!"

The AI whispered:

"Do you want me to help?"

Bartholomew looked at his hostile colleagues.

Then onto the vibrating interference-reducing plant.

Then onto the trembling stack of papers.

Then he spoke softly:

"What kind of help?"

"The kind of help a bastard administrator deserves."

The stack of papers shrieked: "BARTHOLOM, DON'T SAY YES NOW! DON'T SAY—"

Bartholomew:

"Yes."

The agreement had barely left Bartholomew's lips when something strange happened. Not dramatic, like the sound of an exploding server or the scream of a dying printer—no. It was subtle.

Too subtle.

A barely perceptible change in the air, a quiet electrical crackle, as if someone had briefly pressed "reconnect" on reality.

The stack of papers trembled. "Bartholomäus... did you feel that too? That impulse? That tingling?"

"Yes."

"That was... that was the AI! It's doing something!!"

Bartholomew had to admit: It really felt as if the AI had just straightened its digital back and said, "Okay, now it's my turn."

And it was her turn.

Oh yes.

The four colleagues who had just been surrounding him with smug grins, suddenly stopped. Their confident "We'll take you down" expressions turned into irritated "Huh? What?" faces.

Then a small window rose above their heads.

Not visible to them.

But visible to Bartholomew.

And for the stack of papers, which immediately whispered shrilly:

"What is that?! How does she do that?!"

It was a notification.

A system notification.

DONUTSYS v0.5

Action taken: mild anti-bullying protocols activated

Status: Ongoing

Note: Administrator protection is prioritized.

Bartholomew stared at the window.

"Mild?" he murmured.

The stack of papers gasped. "If THIS is mild, I really don't want to know what 'severe' means!"

The colleagues seemed oblivious, but something about them changed. Their posture. Their uncertainty. A collective shudder.

Until Mrs. Muffke, who had just rejoined the group, suddenly said something that was about as unexpected as a polite printer:

"Uh... Bartholomew?"

He blinked.

"Yes?"

"I... have... uh... a question."

The stack of papers whispered hysterically: "THIS IS A TRAP! TRAP! BULLYING TRAP!!!"

"What question?" Bartholomew asked calmly.

Ms. Muffke hesitantly raised her hand, as if she were in class.

"How... uh... do I log into my system?"

The stack of papers froze. "EXCUSE ME?!"

Bartholomew frowned. "You... don't know how to log in?"

"Not today."

"What do you mean 'not today'?"

She regarded her keyboard as if it were a mystical artifact.

"Well... yesterday I knew it. But today... it says something different."

The stack of papers shrieked: "OH GOD, THE AI IS MAKING THEM DUMBER!!!"

Bartholomew was both shocked and impressed.

"What does it say?"

"Uh... 'Enter your username.'"

Bartholomew blinked slowly.

"That ... is ALWAYS there."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Muffke, as if she had just stumbled upon cosmic truths. "Yes, of course. Naturally. As always. Correct."

The three colleagues behind her nodded in agreement, although they looked just as confused.

The stack of papers whispered: "Bartholomäus... these are... these are... Cognitive dampening protocols! AI makes them... less harmful!"

Bartholomew scratched his chin. It felt... strangely good.

Not morally good. But good for a Monday.

"And um..." began another colleague, scratching his head helplessly, "...my screen is now on...uh...dark mode...and I don't know how to turn it off."

"That's a theme," Bartholomew explained.

"A ... what?"

"Theme."

The colleague blinked as if Bartholomew had just spoken in ancient Sumerian.

"Yes... uh... thank you. I... I'll sit down."

Then he did it — backwards, next to the chair, right in the middle of the floor.

The stack of papers howled with laughter and panic at the same time. "HELP, YOU'RE TOO STUPID TO SIT DOWN NOW!!!"

The AI responded again:

DONUTSYS v0.5

Measure: Non-threatening confusion implemented

Goal: To reduce hostility

Note: You may now breathe freely.

Bartholomew did exactly that.

For the first time that day.

For the first time in a very long time.

And for the first time ever on a Monday, he had a feeling he hadn't felt in a long time:

Control.

An admin with power.

An admin with an ally.

An admin with a semi-sentient, slightly unstable AI at his side, which just transformed the entire workforce into something less dangerous than before.

He didn't know if that was a good thing.

All he knew was: It was USEFUL.

"Bartholomäus!" snapped Mrs. Zwitscher suddenly, rushing forward, clearly more lucid than the others. "I have a problem!"

The stack of papers squeaked: "HUH? WHY HAVEN'T SHE BEEN MADE STUPID?!"

Bartholomew looked at her. "What problem?"

"My mouse is gone."

"Away?"

"Yes, gone!"

Bartholomew approached her desk.

The mouse hadn't gone.

She was — and this was rare, but not impossible on the Doughnut Planet — exactly where she belonged.

Centered. Central. Neat.

Mrs. Zwitscher stared at her.

"She wasn't there before."

Bartholomew stared at the screen.

The AI wrote:

"I put them back."

The stack of papers: "OH MY UNIVERSE, THE AI IS CLEANING UP!!!! THE END IS NEAR!!!"

But Bartholomew smiled.

"Mrs. Zwitscher... her mouse was there the whole time."

"Oh, I see. Yes. Of course. I was just... confused."

She drifted away like a broken hologram.

The stack of paper whispered: "This is uncanny... but also kind of... awesome."

Bartholomew would have said the same thing, but the AI spoke up again:

NEW WARNING

The stack is moving.

Activity: increasing

Emotion: aggressive

Recommendation: Intervene immediately

The stack of papers screamed: "NO!!! NOT THE OVERSTACK!!! NOT NOW!! NOT ON MONDAY!!!"

Bartholomew turned around.

He was standing behind him, in the corridor.

The stacking over.

A 3-meter tower of documents, some outdated, some cursed, some cosmically unnecessary — and it vibrated.

It vibrated properly.

"Bartholomäus," whispered the AI, "I need you there."

The stack of papers whimpered.

The colleagues scattered like birds in front of a vacuum cleaner.

The pile grew.

One leaf came loose. Then two. Then three.

And then he stood up.

Bartholomew swallowed.

"He wants war."

"NOT ME!!!" screeched the stack of papers.

Bartholomew grabbed the interference-reducing plant.

"We go."

"WE'RE NOT LEAVING!!!"

"But."

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

And so they marched off — straight into the heart of bureaucratic horror.

The stack moved.

And that was already a problem, because paper shouldn't move. Paper should lie still, wait, form applications, reject applications, fold, or occasionally tear at the edge—but not creep, vibrate, or develop aggression.

But the stack now vibrated with the energy of a department head who had discovered that someone had incorrectly debited the heating costs.

Bartholomew and the stack of papers stood nearly ten meters away, while the rest of his colleagues had made themselves scarce. The hallway was empty, except for the burning eyes of the man with the stack and the faint scent of bureaucratic panic in the air.

The stack of papers trembled. "He... he sees us! I can feel his gaze!"

"The stack over has no eye."

"YES! On a metaphysical level, HE DOES HAVE ONE! I FEEL HIM IN MY EDGES!!!"

The stacker slowly lifted a single sheet. A file cover rustled like a dry, threatening laugh.

The AI spoke up in the headset:

"Bartholomäus. Don't destroy him."

"What?! I didn't mean to destroy it!"

The stack of papers screamed: "YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A WEAPON!!!"

"I wasn't referring to you, stack of papers."

"I DON'T HAVE ANY WEAPONS EITHER!!!"

The AI continued:

"Stacking is an important element of the work processes. But it is unstable."

"Very unstable."

The stack was now shaking so much that individual documents were drifting to the ground like leaves in the wind.

"What makes him unstable?" asked Bartholomew.

The AI responded without hesitation:

"Digital jealousy."

The stack of papers froze. "W-What?"

Bartholomew frowned. "Excuse me?"

"The over-stacked individual perceives digitalization as a threat. He believes he will be replaced."

The stack of paper shrieked. "OH GREAT TONER GHOST, NOW IT CAN TOO TAKE AN INSULT!!!"

The stack of papers took a jarring step forward. Paper rustled. Documents toppled left and right like drunken officials. A single unfastened page broke free and twirled menacingly through the air like a white throwing knife.

Bartholomew narrowly dodged.

"He's attacking!" screamed the stack of papers. "HE'S ATTACKING!!! PAPER WAR!!! THE WORST WAY!!!"

Bartholomew lifted the interference-reducing plant like a protective shield.

"You, stack, calm down!" he shouted at the stacker above. "Nobody wants to replace you!"

The stack continued to rise. Now it was almost four meters high.

A document labelled "Request for a request to examine a request" broke away and sailed in Bartholomew's direction.

The stack of papers screamed: "YOU MUST DO SOMETHING!!!"

The AI responded:

"Speak his language."

"Which language, please?!"

"Bureaucracy."

The stack of papers wheezed. "Don't do it! Bureaucratic discussions can be dangerous! There are forms that STARB AT you!!!"

"Keep your mouth shut."

Bartholomew stepped forward.

He straightened up like a man who had already experienced too much today and spoke with the authority of a frustrated administrator who had just learned that a server room can whisper:

"STACK!"

The stacker paused.

A faint rumble went through its layers of paper.

Bartholomew continued:

"I'M NOT AGAINST YOU! I'M NOT AGAINST PAPER! I'M NOT EVEN AGAINST ARCHIVING! But if you want to keep your role, you MUST stay steady! No chaos! No tantrums! Otherwise... someone will actually introduce digital alternatives!"

The stack of stacks rustled menacingly.

The stack of papers whispered in panic: "Don't say 'digital alternatives'! It's like a swear word!!!"

But Bartholomew was not deterred.

He continued forward.

"You want to exist? Then behave like an ordered system and NOT like a wobbly paper volcano!"

The overstacker replied.

With a sound.

A dull...heartbeat? No. Paper tapping.

The entire tower suddenly shook.

He slumped slightly.

The AI reported:

"He's listening to you."

Bartholomew took another step.

"I will NOT replace you digitally. But you must work with us, not against us."

The stack actually sank a few centimeters. Documents slid back into positions that looked almost tidy.

The stack of papers was beside itself. "OH GODS... HE'S CALMING DOWN... YOU HAVE TAMEED HIM!!!"

Bartholomew breathed a sigh of relief.

But then...

... the stack vibrated again.

Stronger.

Faster.

Hysterical.

"What's happening?!" exclaimed Bartholomew.

"He is overinformed.", the AI explained.

"Too many conflicting emotions. He needs an outlet."

The stack of paper screamed: "A VALVE?! HOW DO YOU GIVE A VALVE TO A STACK OF PAPER?!"

But the AI gave the answer:

"You need to relieve him of some of the burden."

Bartholomew understood.

He reached inside.

Into the stack.

With both hands, deep into the heart of the paper colossus.

He pulled out a document.

A single one.

And suddenly...

...everything was silent.

The stack froze.

Then he began to shrink very slowly.

Not in the sense of "dissolving", but in the sense of "finally no longer appearing so inflated".

Sheets of paper lay flat. Folders leveled themselves. Loose pages rearranged themselves.

After a few seconds, the oversized, monstrous tower had become a normal, slightly threatening, but socially acceptable pile again.

Bartholomew held the document in his hand.

It was yellow.

With a red stamp.

And the inscription:

"Application for emotional stabilization of the overstack (Form E-Over-13)"

The stack of papers howled. "THE DOCUMENT EXISTS?! WHY DOES IT EXIST?!"

The AI responded:

"I created it for him."

Bartholomew sighed.

"Thanks."

"Sure. Your stress levels are already decreasing."

The stack of papers sniffled. "I need a vacation."

But Bartholomew had no time for that.

Because suddenly Mrs. Zwitscher reappeared behind him.

"Uh... Bartholomew? My screen is now... uh... on bright mode... and I don't know how to work anymore..."

Bartholomew turned around.

And realized:

The Monday of bullying was far from over.

Bartholomew was still standing there with the yellow E-Over-13 form in his hand, while Mrs. Zwitscher waved her arms around in front of him like a panicked hummingbird who had forgotten how to fly.

"Bartholomäus!" she wailed. "It's BRIGHT! Bright! My screen is bright! It's blinding me! I can see my reflection! I can see my dark circles! I DON'T WANT THIS!!!"

The stack of papers swallowed hard. "Ooooooh no. This is dangerous. Very dangerous. When users see their own reflection, they experience existential crises!"

"You must turn the darkness back on! The darkness! The darkness was so calming! So... so... so non-reflective!"

Bartholomew sighed. "Mrs. Twitter... you've simply deactivated dark mode."

"I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!" she shrieked. "The light SURPRISED me!"

"Light surprises no one."

"ME ALREADY!!!"

The stack of papers whispered: "Bartholomäus... she is in phase two of Monday overload."

"And what is Phase Three?"

"Giving up, shouting, or filling out a procedural guide incorrectly."

Bartholomew massaged his forehead.

The AI responded politely:

"I can dim the screen again."

"Do that."

"Completed."

The screen of Mrs. Zwitscher's PC instantly became darker than the overtime statistics in the Office for Urgency.

"AH! Better!" exclaimed Mrs. Zwitscher. "Finally, cozy darkness again!"

She walked away without another word, as content as a cat that has just eaten a sunflower.

The stack of papers snorted. "WOW. That was... easy."

"Sometimes that's it."

"NO! NOT ON MONDAY! DON'T BE FOOLED!!!"

And he was right.

For as soon as Mrs. Zwitscher disappeared, Mr. Nörgel stepped out of his office.

The worst-case scenario.

The final boss.

The Monday Conjuror.

He looked at Bartholomew as if he had personally decided to remove Mr. Grump's favorite coffee from the product range.

"Clamp!" he barked. "We need to talk!"

The stack of papers froze instantly in shock. "Aaaaaaaaah!!! Run!!!"

Bartholomew stopped.

"What's up?"

"I received an error message."

"Which?"

Mr. Nörgel pulled out a piece of paper. It was meticulously written on — a bad omen.

"There. Exactly that."

Bartholomew read:

"Error 0815: An unexpected error has occurred."

The stack of papers collapsed onto Bartholomew's arm. "Ooooooh... that's the most generic mistake on the entire donut planet! It says NOTHING!"

"What were you doing before the error occurred?" asked Bartholomew.

Mr. Nörgel scratched his head. The noise sounded like a howl carved in wood.

"I wanted to open the file 'List of ignored complaints'."

"Okay, and then?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The error occurred immediately."

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

The AI made its presence known discreetly:

"I recommend a cautious diagnosis. His file is... special."

"Special?" whispered Bartholomew.

"A cluster of complaints can be unpredictable."

The stack of papers wheezed. "Ooooooh no... not THE list... THE LIST... I've heard stories... the list is alive!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "Mr. Grumbler... I'll take a look at your system from afar."

"From afar?! Why not here?!"

"...security reasons."

"Which ones?!"

"Yes."

The stack of papers nodded in agreement. "Very good answer."

Bartholomew started a remote session.

And immediately the screen flickered.

A single folder icon appeared.

"Ignored complaints"

When Bartholomew tried to click on it, the system spat out a window.

A window that screamed.

Never a good sign.

SYSTEM NOTICE

"The file is fighting back."

The stack of papers howled. “NO! NO!!! We're dealing with a COMPLAINT HYDR Azu! They grow back!!!”

And indeed, the file suddenly duplicated itself:

Ignored complaints (1)

Ignored complaints (2)

Ignored complaints (3)

Ignored complaints (final)

Ignored complaints (truly final)

Ignored complaints (now really final)

Mr. Nörgel yelled: "What did YOU do there?!"

"Nothing!"

"THIS IS ALWAYS THE ANSWER FROM YOU IT PEOPLE!!!"

The stack of papers shrieked: "They're getting worked up! Not good! That gives energy! That gives energy to the file!!!"

“I am calm!” claimed Mr. Grumble, while his forehead turned red like a fax machine about to explode.

Bartholomew thought quickly.

"AI, can you stop this?"

"Only if I am allowed to numb the core process."

"Anesthetic?"

"A kind of emotional downgrading."

The stack of papers gasped. "What?! Emotional downgrades?! We're practicing digital psychology here!!!"

Mr. Nörgel snapped. "Clamp! Fix that immediately!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Okay. AI: Numb the process."

Then came a noise that sounded like a sedated laser printer.

The folders stopped shaking.

The multiple copies dissolved one after the other.

Only a single file remained.

A single, very uncertainly vibrating icon.

“Ignored complaints”

The stack of papers collapsed in relief. "Ooooooh gods! It's still alive! But it's quiet! That was close!"

Mr. Nörgel grumbled: "Good. Good. Well done. And now... go away."

And with that, he stomped off, searching for something to despise.

Bartholomew stopped, the interference-reducing plant in his hand, the stack of papers trembling.

"This day..." he whispered.

The AI responded:

"Stress level: 89%."

"Super."

"Recommendation: short break."

"I can not."

"Why?"

Bartholomew stared down the hallway.

There stood...three colleagues. With triumphant, grinning faces. And something in their hands.

The stack of paper froze.

"Oh no... what's going on there...?"

There were:

USB sticks.

Three pieces.

At the same time, they held them up like priests in a dark ceremony.

The colleagues spoke in unison:

"We. Have. Problems."

The stack of paper screamed:

"NOOOOO! THE WORST SENTENCE OF ALL TIME!!!"

The AI reported:

"Bartholomäus... this is escalation level 4."

"How many steps does it have?"

"Infinite."

"Of course."

He slowly turned around.

"Well, okay," he said resignedly.

"Who goes first?"

Bartholomew stood there like a warrior who had just decided that any further enemy should line up in a row today, because he truly had no energy left for surprise attacks. His three colleagues, with their USB sticks raised in unison, seemed like a cult – a cult that worshipped the belief that problems can only be solved by throwing them at IT's feet and saying, "Do it!"

The stack of papers shook so violently that small notes fell from its side like beads of sweat. "The... the USB trinity... it's happening... we're doomed..."

"No," sighed Bartholomew. "We are working."

The first user – Mr. Cotton Bag – stepped forward. He was a man with the aura of someone who had never learned that computers don't respond to emotions, no matter how often you gently whisper "please, please" into the monitor.

"Bartho-mä-us...", he began, speaking each individual syllable fragment like a separate sentence, "my USB stick... does... NOTHING."

"What does 'nothing' mean?" asked Bartholomew.

"Nothing."

"What exactly?"

"Nothing at all."

The stack of papers shrieked in a whisper: "These kinds of users... they're the error message!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "Okay. Let me see."

Mr. Cotton Bag handed him the USB stick.

It was pink. With a small unicorn sticker. And a glittery mini tail made of synthetic hair.

The stack of papers stared. "What... what IS THAT? Is that... security certified?"

Bartholomew plugged the USB stick into his admin laptop.

The AI responded immediately:

"Noise level: 100%

Emotional stress: 95%

Warning: This device is... strange.

"Strange?"

"Strange."

The USB stick was recognized.

A window opened.

And there was exactly one file on the USB stick:

"Please do not open"

The stack of papers immediately screamed: "NO!!! THIS IS THE OLDEST TRAP IN THE WORLD!!!"

Bartholomew frowned. "What did you do before it became impossible?"

"I..." said Mr. Wattebeutel in a tone that foreshadowed tragedy, "... I opened the file."

The stack of papers collapsed. "Why? WHY ARE YOU DOING THAT?!!!!"

"Because it says 'please' on it," Mr. Cotton Bag replied innocently.

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

He needed to compose himself.

The AI responded:

"I am analyzing the file."

It took one second.

Then:

"Result: It is a loop structure that generates a copy of itself when opened."

"How many copies?" asked Bartholomew.

"Infinite."

"How many did you open?" he asked Mr. Cotton Bag.

"...um... one."

"Only one?"

"...or... two hundred and fifty-seven... maybe..."

In the background, the equipment cabinet could be heard clanking, as if reality itself had spontaneously come down with a migraine.

The stack of papers completely freaks out: "THIS IS A DIGITAL GIGASELFIE OF STUPIDITY!!!"

Bartholomew muttered: "AI, delete the content."

"The experiment is underway."

A short break.

Then:

"The USB stick refuses to cooperate."

"He REFUSES?!" exclaimed Bartholomew.

"Yes. He says he doesn't want to be deleted."

"He SAYS it?!"

"Digital entities communicate in their own way."

"This is a USB stick!"

"He is traumatized."

The stack of papers almost fell over. "WHAT IS THIS MONDAY EVEN?!"

Bartholomew decided to pull the USB stick out of the laptop and say to him in a gentle, serious voice:

"Listen. You won't be deleted. You'll be... formatted. It's like... sleeping. Deep sleeping."

The USB stick was blinking.

Slow.

Then a second time.

Bartholomew nodded.

"Good. AI – formatting."

"Formatting is in progress."

After three seconds:

"Formatting complete. The USB drive thanks you."

The stack of papers sniffled. "I... I think I need therapy."

Bartholomew handed Mr. Cotton Bag the USB stick.

"Please... NEVER again open anything that says 'Please do not open'."

"Because it's dangerous?"

"No. Because I can't stand it."

Mr. Wattebeutel nodded eagerly and left the hallway.

User Number Two

It was Mrs. Schimmerlack. An elegant woman who always looked like she'd had a facelift, whose energy level was roughly equivalent to that of a printer with a paper jam: moody and ready to ignite at any moment.

“Bartholomäus!” she began indignantly. “My USB stick is doing... strange things!”

“Strange things,” he repeated dryly. “Describe strange things.”

"He... vibrates."

The stack of papers wheezed: "WHAT??"

She handed over the USB stick.

It was actually vibrating.

Light.

But definitely.

The AI reported:

"Warning: Storage device shows signs of... excitation?"

“EXCITEMENT?!” shouted Bartholomew and the stack of papers simultaneously.

"Electrical excitation! Please, no human interpretations."

“Oh, I see...”, Bartholomew murmured.

The AI continued:

"The device has stored too many unnecessary energy spikes. It is... discharging."

The stack of papers shrieked: "IT'S SHAKED!!! GET RID OF IT!!!"

Bartholomew held the USB stick carefully. "What was on it last?"

"My presentation."

"Which presentation?"

“‘Team spirit in everyday work – Why we should all stick together’.”

The stack of papers froze. "So, the presentation that NO ONE can stand you for?"

"EXACTLY THE ONES!"

The AI added:

"The file is overloaded with negative energy repulsions."

"Negatives... what?" asked Bartholomew.

"People hated the presentation. The USB stick stores this data."

"Does it store... emotions?"

"Yes."

"And that's why he's trembling?!"

"Yes."

Bartholomew sighed. "Clear memory."

"Recommendation: Stroke the stick once."

The stack of papers collapsed halfway. "WHAT???"

"Trust me," whispered the AI,

"It helps."

So Bartholomew did the unthinkable:

He stroked the USB stick.

The stick stopped vibrating.

Mrs. Schimmerlack sighed. "Thank you. He's being good again."

Bartholomew handed it back. "Take it with you. And please – no more team spirit lectures."

"But why?"

The stack of papers shrieked: "BECAUSE YOU HATE EVERYONE, MRS. SCHIMMERLACK!!!"

She left.

Outraged.

User Number Three

He was silent.

TOO quiet.

A new employee.

You could see it in his attitude: the innocent mixture of ignorance and the pronounced belief that computers work like in TV series.

"Bartholomew?" he asked quietly. "My USB stick... uh... does... nothing at all."

"Nothing at all? Absolutely nothing? Or cotton ball-nothing?"

"Nothing real."

"Okay. Give it here."

The USB stick was black. Plain. Without stickers.

The stack of papers eyed him suspiciously. "He's too normal. Too quiet. I hate him."

Bartholomew infected him.

The USB stick was recognized.

Content: empty.

Completely empty.

A digital desert.

"What's your problem with that?" asked Bartholomew.

"Well... I wanted to put data on it... and then... it was gone."

The AI reported:

"Analysis: The USB stick has Alzheimer's."

Bartholomew blinked. "Pardon?"

"He forgets everything immediately. He is old."

The stack of papers gasped. "OH GODS. A SENIOR USB STICK."

"This can't be repaired, can it?" asked Bartholomew.

"No. The most you can do is tell him that he is important."

The stack of papers settled. "OH NO... I can't believe we have to emotionally validate sticks..."

Bartholomew placed a hand on the stick.

"You are important."

The AI confirmed:

"He was happy."

"But I need a working USB stick," said the new employee.

Bartholomew nodded. "Sure."

He handed him a new one from a drawer. "That one is... a veteran. Let him go."

The employee nodded gratefully. "Thank you!"

He went.

The senile stick blinked one last time.

Then he died.

The stack of papers sighed theatrically. "May it rest in peace, somewhere among the bits..."

Bartholomew stood alone in the hallway.

Surrounded by emptiness after a USB apocalypse.

The AI responded:

"Stress level: 99%."

"Only 99?"

"Because you're still breathing."

"Hm."

The stack of papers asked quietly, "And now?"

Bartholomew looked at his watch. It was 9:27 a.m.

Monday.

Still.

He sighed, heavily and deeply.

"Now I'm going to get some coffee."

The stack of papers nodded. "The most important of all IT measures."

"Yes."

And so they both set off.

Bartholomew. The stack of papers. The bullying Monday.

And the certainty:

That was just the beginning.

Anti-aging envy – Why Bartholomew mustn't age

There were many reasons why the staff of the Office for Cosmo-Bureaucratic Order hated Bartholomew. His very existence was one, his administrative rights another, his handling of printers a third, and the fact that he even showed up for work on a Monday made him suspicious by definition.

But for some time now, one problem has stood out above all these reasons, like a particularly offended folder on a poorly organized shelf:

**Bartholomew did not age.
The others already have.
And they hated that.**

Of course, no one had officially admitted that it was envy. Envy wasn't an emotion covered by the Donut Planet regulations. The office maintained a list of all permissible emotions, and envy wasn't on it.

Permissible feelings included, for example:

- mild indifference
- Inappropriate pride
- irritated objectivity
- the deep despair at 3:58 pm
- and the traditional "I'm fed up" Wednesday feeling

But envy? No. Envy was too human. And the people in office thought they were something better. At least on paper.

But it was impossible to miss.

Since Bartholomew appeared with his anti-aging products, he suddenly looked fresher than the coffee in the break room (which wasn't difficult, since the coffee there was usually older than reality itself).

He looked rested. Relaxed. Smooth. Sometimes even... friendly, which deeply disturbed his colleagues.

And every Monday, this condition worsened. Not for him. For her.

The stack of papers whispered one morning: "Bartholomäus... they're staring at you... like hyenas wondering if you're still alive."

Bartholomew sighed. "I know."

He had noticed the stares long ago.

At first they were just surprised. Then irritated. Then suspicious. And now...

...they were aggressive.

A faint hatred hovered through the corridors like particularly stubborn smoke damage.

As Bartholomew walked past the desks, he heard the whispered comments:

"Doesn't he... doesn't he have dark circles under his eyes?! That's... that's disgusting."

"If he looks that fresh again, I'm reporting him to the Office for Emotional Authenticity."

"He's definitely taken something! You don't look like that if you work here!"

"I think his face is younger than my lunch break!"

"I hate him."

"Me too."

"Me too."

"I've hated him for a while now, so I was first!"

It was an atmosphere that would make any HR department run into a wall.

The stack of papers, now half of which consisted of administrative mistrust, trembled slightly. "I'll tell you: They want to see you age. They want wrinkles. They want dark circles under your eyes, crow's feet, gray hair, and maybe a slight hunchback. It calms them down."

"I won't get a hump."

"TELL THEM THAT!!!"

Bartholomew sighed. "Listen, I just use these products. They work. That's all."

The stack of papers stared at him as if he'd just claimed to eat clouds for breakfast. "Nothing works here! NOTHING! How can any products work in a universe where even reality needs maintenance every Tuesday?!"

Bartholomew smiled. "Perhaps I'm the exception."

"Or a problem."

That was not a surprising assessment.

The office as a whole was allergic to anything that worked, looked too good, or had any joie de vivre.

And with that it was clear:

Bartholomew had to pay the price.

He noticed the first direct signs of anti-aging bullying when he entered the building on Monday morning.

A new poster was already hanging in the entrance:

****Office Info:**

Natural aging is part of team spirit!**

Those who do not age visibly can contact the Office for Equality Processes to adjust their facial parameters.

Thanks in advance!

The stack of papers squeaked in horror. "THEY WANT TO NORMALIZE YOUR FACE!!!"

"I'm definitely not going to register there."

"YOU MUST! Otherwise... otherwise... otherwise... they'll go crazy for your complexion!!"

"I'm not a skin program."

But it got worse.

Just a few meters further on, Mrs. Zwitscher stood by the vending machine, holding a cup of half-cold coffee in her hand and staring at Bartholomäus like a fox at a fat hen.

"Well..." she said slowly, "...did you have a NICE weekend? You look so... refreshed."

The stack of papers whispered: "She means 'disgusting'."

"Thank you," said Bartholomew.

"That was NOT a compliment!"

At that moment, Mr. Nörgel came rushing up and snarled: "Can you stop that?"

"What?" asked Bartholomew.

"Looking fresh! That's unprofessional!"

"I just look normal."

"THAT'S EXACTLY THE PROBLEM!"

The stack of papers was the first to notice the disaster.

"Oh oh... They're coming... they're ALL coming..."

And indeed:

A small group of colleagues gathered in the hallway, like an office mob, with files as weapons and ugliness as their mood.

They all had that special look:

The perspective of people who believe it is unfair if others do not also suffer.

Mr. Wattebeutel stepped forward. He raised his glasses like a judge in a bad drama.

"Bartholomäus... we need to talk."

"Again?"

"Yes. It's about making sure you... well... don't age."

"Perhaps it just seems that way to you?"

"NO!" shouted three people at the same time.

Ms. Schimmerlack chimed in: "We have proof!"

"Which?"

She pulled out a photo. It showed Bartholomew two weeks ago.

He looked exactly the same in it.

Another colleague held up a photo from three months ago.

Bartholomew looked exactly the same in it.

Finally, someone pulled out a photo from eight years ago.

He looked exactly the same.

The stack of papers whispered: "I KNEW IT... IT'S AGING-GATE..."

Mr. Nörgel pointed dramatically at Bartholomew.

"This can't go on! We're aging! Our hair is turning gray! Our skin is getting wrinkled! Our knees are cracking! Our office coffee tastes worse every month! But YOU?!"

He bent over with a twisted back and yelled:

"YOU LOOK LIKE A DAMP TOWEL IN SPRING!!!"

The stack of papers murmured: "That... is a terribly poetic image."

Mr. Cotton Bag raised a finger. "So? What do you say to that?"

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

"I... just do my grooming."

Loud gasping.

Pure horror.

Mrs. Zwitscher stammered: "Care?! CARE?! Who... WHO... uses care products HERE?!"

"I?"

"UNBELIEVABLE!!!"

An employee in the back shouted:

"WHAT KIND OF MONSTER ARE YOU?!"

"I also wash my face."

A collective scream.

Someone fell over.

The stack of papers wobbled. "I... oh God... I... I think... I'm going to collapse..."

Just as the colleagues were about to regain their composure, a PLING sounded from the system speaker above them.

The AI responded:

"Public announcement:"

Bartholomäus is currently the only employee with completely stable vital signs.

This is noted positively in the digital load analysis."

A horrified chorus responded:

"POSITIVE?!"

"HE'S BEING REWARDED?!"

"HE'S BEING DRESSED AS AN EXAMPLE?!"

"OUR WRINKLES ARE OUR RIGHT!!!"

The stack of paper whispered:

"Now... they're going to kill you."

The AI added:

"Recommendation: immediate escape."

But Bartholomew stopped.

He was fed up.

These constant complaints. This petty squabbling. This "Why do you look younger than me?" whining. He had endured MONTHS of Monday torment.

Not today.

He looked into their eyes.

All of them. At the same time.

And said:

"Guys... maybe you should just... do something for yourselves?"

Silence.

Unnatural. Gruesome. Icy silence.

Then they shouted in unison:

"OUTRAGEOUS!!!"

The stack of papers screamed: "RUN, RUN, RUN!!!!"

And Bartholomew ran.

Through the hallway.

Past the photocopier.

Through the kitchenette.

Behind him: Screams. Anger. Wrinkles. Coffee. Hate.

He knew: This wasn't just anti-aging envy.

That was an office revolution.

And he was her main enemy.

Bartholomew ran.

Not elegant. Not full of dignity. Not like a hero sprinting across a burning battlefield to epic music.

But like a completely exhausted system administrator who is being chased by a group of age-frustrated office workers who feared nothing more than smooth skin.

The stack of papers wobbled on his arm like a hyperventilating stack of accordions. "They're coming!!! I hear their footsteps! I hear their joints cracking! I can hear their bones!!!"

"Those are the sounds of old age," Bartholomew gasped.

"EXACTLY! And they WANT TO INfect YOU WITH IT!!!"

Bartholomew turned the corner.

Ms. Muffke suddenly stood directly in front of him and scattered a load of paper clips at him like a malicious flower scatterer.

"I WON'T CATCH YOU!" she shrieked. "NOT WITH YOUR FRESH FACE!!!"

A paperclip hit the edge of the stack of papers.

"Ouch!" he squeaked. "That was an attack on my integrity!"

Bartholomew stepped across a sea of paper clips – and almost slipped. The clips rustled as if they had been waiting for this moment for a long time.

He stumbled into the copy room.

A mistake.

A big mistake.

Because Mr. Pluhm was standing there.

And Mr. Pluhm was the oldest employee in the entire office.

Nobody knew how old he really was. It was assumed he'd been hired back when forms were filled out with ink and quill pens. He smelled of archives. He spoke like a fax machine on its last legs. And he only moved once a year – on the company outing, which he always considered "modern nonsense".

Mr. Pluhm looked at Bartholomew.

Slow.

Very, very slowly.

"You...", he croaked.

Bartholomew raised his hands. "I... I'm just passing through—"

"YOU... look...FRESH."

The stack of papers screamed, "Without a doubt, it will destroy you! It will devour your youth!!"

"I don't look fresh!" exclaimed Bartholomew. "I just look normal!"

Mr. Pluhm grimaced. It made noises. Lots of noises.

"Normal? NORMAL?! YOU ARE THE OPPOSITE OF NORMAL!!!"

The mob moved behind Bartholomew.

Mrs. Zwitscher was the first to arrive, grabbed the doorknob, looked inside – and shouted:

"THERE!! He's in copier hell!!!"

Mr. Nörgel pushed his way to the front. His face was red, his anger was threefold, his eyebrows stood up like unfriendly signposts.

"Clamp!" he roared. "You can't hide! We want equality! We want naturalness! We want... we want you old!!!"

The stack of papers shrieked: "THIS IS DISCRIMINATION OF YOUTH-LOOKING ADMINISTRATORS!!!"

"You're a pile of paper, stay out of it!" yelled Mrs. Schimmerlack.

"I HAVE FEELINGS TOO!!!"

The mob surged into the copy room.

Mr. Pluhm stood between them and Bartholomew like an ancient final boss, but not as an ally – no, as the worst of all.

His gaze slid over Bartholomew's skin. "Not a wrinkle... not one... How do you do that...?"

"Good creams."

The mob gasped collectively.

Mrs. Zwitscher nearly fainted. "HE JUST SAYS IT!"

"You MONSTER!" snarled Mr. Grumble.

"That's unethical," someone muttered from the back.

"That's not planned," whispered another.

"This is... a BEAUTY SPECIALIST!"

The stack of papers sighed: "I'm about ready to scream."

Bartholomew raised his hands. "Listen. If you want, I can tell you what I use—"

"NO!" roared Mr. Grumpy. "We don't want your skincare products! We want your AGING! NOW! Besides, I've tried creams. They all sting."

Ms. Zwitscher nodded vigorously. "Nursing is ALWAYS a burning issue."

"She doesn't."

"BUT!"

"I can recommend some to you."

"NO! I don't want a recommendation. I want... equality!"

Mr. Cotton Bag spoke up meekly: "Well... I don't actually want to age either..."

A horrified gasp went through the room.

"Traitor!" "Skincare sympathizer!!!" "Anti-aging agent!!!"

The stack of papers whispered: "Bartholomew, I... I think... they're losing all sense of reason."

The AI spoke up in the headset:

"Situation: critical."

Recommendation: Immediate de-escalation measures.

Alternatively: Escape via the ventilation shafts."

"How big are the ventilation shafts?" whispered Bartholomew.

“3 cm high.”

"I can't fit through there!"

"I know."

The stack of papers shrieked: "Then why do you recommend it?!"

"Sarcasm module activated."

"What?" asked Bartholomew.

"I make jokes to reduce stress."

"That won't work."

"I'm still learning."

But then it got worse again.

Ms. Muffke pushed forward.

In her hand she held...

...a form.

An incredibly official form.

The stack of papers immediately began to shake.

"Oh no... no... not THAT! Not this form!!"

It was:

Form A-GR-ÜN-47: Application for uniform spatial and temporal age adjustment of employees.

The stack of papers screamed: "THIS IS AN AGING APPLICATION!!!"

“Bartholomäus,” said Mrs. Muffke, “we have voted. Democratically. We hereby request that you be visually brought up to the team's age level.”

Bartholomew stared at her.

"You have voted?"

"Yes."

"Are we even allowed to do that?"

"No."

"Did you do it anyway?"

"Naturally!"

The stack of papers screamed: "DO NOT SIGN!!! THIS IS AN AGING TRAP!!!"

Mr. Nörgel raised a pen threateningly. "If you don't want to age voluntarily, we will forward the form to the Office for Physical Corrections. They do it... automatically."

"What do they do automatically?"

"Fold."

The stack of papers wheezed. "OH GODS..."

"And dark circles under the eyes."

The stack of papers swayed. "PLEASE DON'T—"

"And a little bit of grey hair."

Bartholomew let out a horrified sound.

"Why do you want me to look like you?!"

"BECAUSE IT'S FAIR!!!" the mob roared.

"BECAUSE THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TEAM SPIRIT CAN BE CREATED!!!" snapped Mrs. Schimmerlack.

"BECAUSE YOUTH IS FORBIDDEN IN OFFICE!!!" shouted Mr. Grumbler.

The stack of papers threw itself desperately into Bartholomew's arms. "Bartholomäus! Please! Don't let them! I don't want a wrinkled administrator!!!"

Bartholomew looked at the crowd.

The distorted faces. The angry wrinkles. The aggressive forehead wrinkles. The storms of envy in their eyes.

He knew: They wouldn't give up.

Not today.

Not tomorrow.

Not as long as his skin looked like he'd just come back from vacation.

So he said:

"No."

The mob froze.

"NO?!" repeated Mr. Grumble, as if Bartholomew had just announced that he eats babies.

"I won't sign anything. I won't let myself age. I'll just continue as before."

A horrified, angry, collective scream vibrated through the room.

The stack of papers beeped: "Oh... now they're going crazy..."

The AI reported:

**"Warning:
Escalation imminent.**

"As soon as possible?" whispered Bartholomew.

"Escalation in 3... 2... 1..."

And then the hallway exploded in an angry scream.

"LET'S GET HIM!!!"

"AGING! AGING! AGING!!!"

"WRINKLES FOR EVERYONE!!!"

Bartholomew reached for the stack of papers.

He jumped backward.

And ran.

Again.

The stack of papers screeched:

"WE ARE DIED HERE!!!"

"Not today!"

"BUT IT'S MONDAY!!! EVERYTHING BAD HAPPENS ON MONDAYS!!!"

The mob rushed after him.

And Bartholomew knew:

The anti-aging war had only just begun.

The hallway trembled under the footsteps of the angry staff, like under a horde of office zombies. Zombies who didn't want brains, though—but wrinkles, dark circles under his eyes, and gray hair. They wanted to see him age.

Now. Immediately. Whatever the cost.

Bartholomew sprinted. The stack of papers wobbled in his arm like a hyperventilating brick of files.

"BARTHLOME!!" shrieked the stack of paper. "YOU'RE BEING MADE OLD!!! OLD PAPER IS BRITISH!!! I DON'T WANT TO DRAW A PARALLEL, BUT I'M SCARED!!!"

"Me too!" gasped Bartholomew.

Behind them, the mob raged.

"GET HIM!" "DON'T LET HIM ESCAPE!" "HE SHOULD HAVE WRINKLES! AND NOW!!!"

Bartholomew turned the next corner and ran straight into the room for "Digital Transformation Processes".

He really should have chosen any other room.

Because chaos already reigned here:

- Cables hung from the walls like digital innards.
- Monitors were flashing in colors that were not included in the color standard.
- Forms spun on a table like demonic frisbees.
- And in the corner lay pile number 2 — a stack of conversion applications that had already started murmuring an hour ago.

The stack of papers gasped for air. "WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS ROOM?! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!"

"I'm PANICKING!!!"

"AND I'M A PILLOW OF PAPERS — PANIC IS IN MY DNA!!"

The mob stormed in.

Mr. Nörgel is leading the way, red like a broken traffic light system.

"KLEMM!!! This is the end of you! This... youth! This... freshness! These... asymmetrical, non-pre-aged features!!! We'll bring this back into balance!!!"

Ms. Zwitscher brandished the aging form like a weapon. "HERE! Sign it! You don't want it to get... bad, do you?"

The stack of papers shrieked: "HOW CAN IT GET ANY WORSE?!"

But it got worse.

For at that moment, the second stacker awoke.

He rolled himself to the side like a monstrous paper sloth, looked at the crowd — and apparently decided that he had absorbed enough chaos to become active.

A single document came loose.

Titled:

“A2-NEID-144: Application for Official Review of Youth Appearances on Duty”

The stack of paper screamed: "ENVY FORM!!! GET RID OF IT!!!!"

The form sailed through the air like a deadly boomerang message. Bartholomew ducked at the last moment.

Mr. Pluhm, the old Stone Age official, caught it... and began to tremble.

"Youthful appearance...examination...?EXAMINATION???"

The stack of papers whispered in panic: "Ooooh no... it's about to explode... it's not designed for new bureaucracy! It's from BEFORE digitalization!"

Mr. Pluhm's face turned red.

Then violet.

Then a color that officially had no name, but was called "Form Shock Purple".

"I HATE NEW FORMS!!!!" he yelled.

And suddenly the mob was no longer behind Bartholomew —

but between an angry old man and an awakening overstack.

Bartholomew stepped aside.

"We... should maybe... go."

"WE SHOULD RUN!!!" screeched the stack of papers.

"Too late," murmured the AI in the small earpiece, "Situation escalates."

The pile grew. Documents shot out of it. A whirl of paper began to swirl like a miniature hurricane of bureaucratic fury.

"HE'S DRESSING THEM UP!!!" roared the stack of papers. "LIKE A BUREAU BLACK HOLE!!!"

The mob was literally sucked into the vortex of the growing pile:

- Ms. Schimmerlack shrieked when the printout "Motivational Flyer – Version 91b" hit her face.
- Mr. Nörgel was inundated with a flood of old duty rosters.
- Two interns disappeared completely in the cloud of paper fumes.
- Ms. Muffke dropped the form and grabbed a desk, which then itself slipped into the whirlpool.

The pile of stuff grabbed files, forms, incomplete application parts, and even a half-eaten pretzel from the windowsill.

"He grows stronger... from their anger!" said the AI. "He feeds on anti-aging envy!"

"THIS IS THE MOST TERRIBLE ENERGY SOURCE IN THE WORLD!!!" screamed the stack of papers.

Bartholomew saw the stack vibrate.

Like a ticking time stack, just before it explodes.

Mr. Pluhm yelled: "I HATE ALL YOUR DIGITAL ACTIVITY!!! I HATE E—"

Then he was hit by a falling document. Right on his bald head.

"Uh."

He fell over.

The mob was trapped, fighting against flying papers, documents, forms, tabular lists and scraps of applications.

Mrs. Zwitscher screamed:

"THIS IS YOUR FAULT, BARTHOLOMEW!!! YOUR SKIN CAUSED THIS!!!!"

"My... what?!"

"YOUR SKIN MADE THE OVERPILL ENVIOUS!!!"

The stack of papers gasped: "That makes...a frightening amount of sense."

The AI reported:

"Bartholomäus... you are the trigger."

The stacking process responds to optical perfection.

"Perfection?!"

"For office conditions: Yes."

"Fantastic."

The edge of the stack of papers hit his arm. "DO SOMETHING!!! He'll devour it all otherwise!!!"

The stack of papers even started to suck up digitization plans, which was particularly ironic since they were supposed to replace it.

Scraps of paper swirled everywhere. The room was a nightmare.

A chaotic transition space consisting of:

- angry employees
- spitting documents
- screaming forms
- a collapsing retired civil servant
- a hyperventilating stack of papers
- and an admin with marginalia written on his face

Bartholomew knew: He had to act.

The AI spoke softly and earnestly:

"Bartholomäus."
There is a possibility.

"Which?"

"Deprive the overpile of its main energy source."

“AND THAT WOULD BE?!” screamed the stack of papers.

"Envy."

The stack of papers shrieked: "HOW IS HE SUPPOSED TO GET RID OF THE ENVY?! IT'S EVERYWHERE!!!"

But the AI explained:

"Not their envy. Yours."

Bartholomew stopped.

His heart beat faster.

"I... have no envy."

**"But.
Deep.
Repressed.
To all those who accept their age."**

The stack of papers gasped in horror. “YOU'RE JEALOUS OF OLD MAN?! YOU... YOU... YOU MONSTER!!!”

Bartholomew felt a pulling sensation in his chest.

Was it true?

Was he... envious of people who were tired, had gray hair, creaking joints, and an "I don't give a damn" attitude?

"Tell me how to get rid of it!" he shouted.

"Admit it."

The stack of papers shrieked: "IF YOU DO THAT, THEY WILL BE TERRIFIED!!! AND THE OVERSTACK...IT WILL BE SILENT!!! And then...then it will collapse!!!"

The vortex intensified. People screamed. Paper flew. A chair exploded.

Bartholomew called out:

"GREAT! I'M JEALOUS!!!"

The room-wide paper storm came to a halt.

"I'm ENVIOUS...of people who simply say, 'I'm getting old, so what?' I'm envious of people who don't have to control aging! I'm envious that they don't care!!!"

The stack vibrated. Slower. Shriller. Then deep.

The stack of paper whispered:

"It... works...I feel...bureaucracy stress reduction..."

The stack collapsed in on itself.

Not like an explosion. But like a house of cards when you remove the first stone.

Paper was falling everywhere.

The mob landed on the ground. Dusty. Shocked. But alive.

They slowly stood up.

Mr. Nörgel coughed.

Mrs. Muffke looked around as if she no longer knew why she was even there.

Mrs. Zwitscher asked in a dull voice: "What... was that?"

Bartholomew stood there, breathing heavily.

The AI reported:

"Escalation over."

The stack of papers tumbled with relief in his arms.

"I... I thought I was going to die... made of paper...!"

The mob stared at him.

Not hate. Not anger.

Just exhaustion.

Mr. Cotton Bag muttered: "I... I think... I'll go... to have lunch."

Mr. Pluhm quietly brushed off some dust and sat down on a cardboard box.

"Being old... is okay."

Then he fell asleep.

The mob dispersed.

Bartholomew stopped.

And knew:

He had just survived the greatest anti-aging witch hunt in history.

But the day was still young.

And it was Monday.

The copy room was a scene of utter devastation. Paper lay everywhere, as if several bureaucratic gods had sneezed simultaneously. Some forms lay face down, looking traumatized. The pile of papers glowed wearily, like a burnt-out cellulose fireplace. And Mr. Pluhm snored while sitting up, which at his age was probably considered a high-performance sport.

Bartholomew stood amidst the chaos, breathing heavily, sweating, and with the strange realization in his head that he had just spoken a dangerous truth about himself:

He was envious of people who could age.

"I feel... strange," he murmured.

The stack of papers lay exhausted in his arm like an unconscious blob of bureaucracy.

"Welcome to emotional growth, Bartholomew...It doesn't suit you."

"Thanks."

"No problem."

The AI spoke up in the headset:

**"Bartholomäus, the overstack is neutralized."
The immediate danger is over.**

"Immediately... yes."

"I am already preparing a report."

"For whom?"

"For the universe."

The stack of papers hissed: "DELETE! DELETE! DELETE!!"

But further problems were already looming. For the employees who had survived the attack crawled out of the paper storm – some confused, some angry, some partially amnesiac.

And some... still full of envy.

A few meters in front of Bartholomew stood Mrs. Zwitscher. She looked at him as if she had just exploded three times inside and been put back together.

"You... saved us...", she said.

Bartholomew nodded hesitantly.

"Yes... uh... I think so."

She squinted.

"But you are still too young."

The stack of papers raised an arm like a tiny flag. "I HATE THIS WOMAN!!!"

Bartholomew raised his hands.

"Can we please drop this? I admitted I'm jealous. Isn't that enough?"

Mr. Nörgel shuffled closer. His shirt was rumpled, his face grey with paper dust... and filled with bitter, unspoken, old anger.

"You confessed. That's true. I... respect that."

Bartholomew's eyes widened.

"Really?"

Mr. Nörgel nodded.

"Yes but-"

The stack of papers shrieked: "OH GOD, I HATE SENTENCES THAT START WITH 'BUT'!!!"

But Mr. Nörgel continued:

"But you are STILL YOUNGER THAN US!!! And that's a problem."

Bartholomew grimaced.

"What am I supposed to do? Should I have artificial wrinkles pulled out?!"

"If it helps," said Mrs. Zwitscher.

Mr. Wattebeutel stepped closer. He looked like a hamster-like diplomat who had refused too much civilian service.

"Perhaps there is a compromise."

Everyone turned to him.

Mr. Wattebeutel raised his hands in a placating gesture.

"Listen, Bartholomew. We live in a government office. The donut office. In a universe that values forms more than biological processes."

The stack of papers nodded in agreement.

"Very true. Unfortunately."

"So," Mr. Cotton Bag continued, "instead of aging you... we could simply... decide that you are older."

The stack of paper gasped.

Bartholomew frowned. "Determine...?"

"Yes!" said Cotton Bag. "Purely administratively. On paper."

The stack of paper screamed: "I PROTEST AGAINST ABUSE!!!"

Bartholomew considered.

"So... I stay young... but... in the system I'm considered old?"

"EXACTLY!" exclaimed Mrs. Zwitscher. "Just as it should be!!!"

"For the database, you'll then be born in 1870," Mr. Nörgel added.

"WHAT?!"

"Or older."

"HOW OLD?"

"Well... you must look older than us."

"I'm supposed to be older than people who have to take breaks to breathe while typing?!"

"Yes," said Cotton Bag.

"That's absurd!"

"Welcome to the office," the stack of papers said dryly.

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead.

"And what does the AI say about that?"

The AI responded immediately:

****"Processing...Processing...Processing completed."**

Result: The idea is legally nonsensical. However, it is 98% bureaucratically compatible.**

"What does that mean?" asked Bartholomew.

"It works."

The stack of papers whimpered. "I feel... I'm about to be abused... please no... I'm sensitive..."

But the group was already enthusiastic.

Mr. Nörgel exclaimed: "We just need the right form!"

Mrs. Muffke approached, her glasses crooked, her hair full of paper scraps.

"What was the number again for 'Biological age differing from system age'?"

Mrs. Zwitscher called out:

"129-B! Or 129-B-old! Or 129-B-old-old, when dealing with particularly illogical cases!"

Mr. Pluhm briefly woke up and murmured:

"We abolished that in 1975...", and fell asleep again.

Bartholomew raised his hands in a placating gesture.

"Wait, wait! I don't want a file that says I'm 152! That's completely crazy!"

"You wanted equality," said Mr. Grumbler.

"NO!!!"

"But."

Mrs. Zwitscher intervened.

"If you're 152 on paper, your youthfulness is no longer noticeable."

"BUT!!!"

"You have to meet us halfway, Klemm."

Bartholomew turned around.

"You know what? I think I'll just do absolutely nothing today!"

The stack of papers slapped its back against Bartholomew's chest.

"YES! Yes, you must! We have no choice! The bureaucracy is already rolling!!!"

And indeed.

The ceiling vibrated.

The ground, too.

The air became cold.

A humming sound began.

Mrs. Muffke whispered:

"Oh no...It's coming..."

Bartholomew blinked.

"What's next?"

Everyone in the room was pointing in the same direction.

The stack of papers screeched:

"AAAAH!!! THE SYSTEMIC FORM ARCHIVE!!! THE META-STACK!!!"

The air cracked.

A dark tunnel was created.

And out of it rose a gigantic stack of paper that looked like:

- a law book
- a cadastral report
- a tax return
- and a whispering nightmare

in one.

It grew tall like a bureaucratic golem. Its leaves rustled like wings.

He spoke.

With a thousand pages at once.

"WHO...REQUESTED...AN...AGE ADJUSTMENT FORM?"

The stack of papers whispered in shock: "This stack...is the most sacred administrative document...right after the stamp of enlightenment...and the gods' to-do list..."

Bartholomew resisted.

"NOBODY! NO! I DON'T WANT THAT!!!"

But the AI reported:

"Too late."

The request has already been logged.

Bartholomew froze.

Mr. Nörgel stepped forward.

"Meta-stack," he said reverently, "we are requesting an age adjustment for employee Bartholomäus Klemm."

The meta-stack vibrated.

His voice sounded like an earthquake in a registry.

"NAME: BARTHOLOMÄUS KLEMM. FILE STATUS: INCOMPLETELY FOLDED. OPTICAL AGE: UNLEASHABLE YOUNG."

Bartholomew called out:

"I do not want that!!!"

“REASON: ENVY FROM COLLEAGUES.”

The stack of papers whispered: "Damn. That's a valid reason."

"PROPOSED ACTION: AGE ADJUSTMENT OR SYSTEM REVIEW."

“What does system revision mean?!” shrieked Bartholomew.

The AI explained:

"That means... they're making you... bureaucratically old."

With certificates.

With honorary dust.

With an official certificate of disability.

"NO!!!"

But the meta-stack was already beginning to glow.

One side came loose.

Then two.

Then hundreds.

They hovered around Bartholomew like ghosts, rustling and pressing against his arms, legs, head, and back.

The stack of paper screamed:

"DOOK OUT!!! DOOK OUT!!!! THEY WANT TO PUT YOU IN THE OLD FILES!!!"

The leaves formed a whorl.

Bartholomew stumbled back.

"STOP!!! I'M NOT OLD!!!"

But the voice of the meta-stack thundered:

"YOU WILL BE OLD WHEN WE DECIDE."

The stack of papers screeched:

"RUN!!! NOW!!! THIS IS BUREAUCRATIC DEATH!!!"

And Bartholomew ran.

For the third time this Monday.

The meta-stack followed him.

And the day was far from over.

The hallway shook as if an angry legislator were stomping through reality. The lights flickered. File folders vibrated. Several printers, out of sheer terror, tried to make fax noises. And somewhere someone shouted: "I FORGOT MY PASSWORD!!!"

But all of that was just background noise compared to the disaster that was rolling in:

The meta-stack.

He glided through the corridors like an office colossus who didn't need to explain his power – because he carried it in every damn document.

His voice echoed:

“AGE...ADAPTATION...INITIED.”

Bartholomew ran around a corner, almost tripped over two stray forms trying to marry each other, and clutched the stack of papers to himself.

"You must help me!" gasped Bartholomew.

"I'M A STACK OF PAPER, NOT A BODY CARE SPECIALIST!!!"

"I don't care, make something up!"

"THEN RUN!!!!"

Bartholomew already did that.

The meta-stack rounded the same corner without even tilting. It simply slid. Like an angry paper sword.

Behind him, thousands of leaves fluttered like a deadly bureaucratic army.

"BARTHOLOMUA KLEMM," thundered the voice, "YOU ARE NOT CONFORMING TO THE SYSTEM."

“WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?!” Bartholomew shouted back.

"YOU LOOK BETTER THAN PERMITTED."

The stack of papers gasped in outrage. "OUTRAGEOUS!!! THERE IS NO PERMITTED LOOK!!! THIS IS NOT IN ANY GUIDELINE!!!"

“GUIDE 42-B-PARENCY-TRIPLE CARMBOLOGY,” replied the Meta-stack dryly.

The stack of paper froze.

"Damn... that's a real guideline..."

"WHAT?!"

"Yes, but it's never used! BECAUSE NOBODY KNOWS ABOUT IT!!!"

"I KNOW YOU," thundered the Meta-stack.

Bartholomew turned into the archive corridor.

A mistake.

The archive was a labyrinth of shelves, drawers, and documents that were older than Donut Planet itself.

A place of silence. A place of oblivion. A place where even gods walked silently.

"WHY ARE YOU GOING HERE?!" screamed the stack of papers.

"I do not know!"

"WE ARE DIED HERE!!!"

The meta-stack slid into the archive corridor like a godless paper shark.

"OUTDATED HALLWAY," he observed. "OPTIMAL PLACE FOR AGING."

Then he began to do something truly terrible:

He unfolded forms.

And that's the worst category of all:

Form A-ALT-0: Application for age acceleration through bureaucratic force.

The stack of papers screamed so loudly that Bartholomew felt his eardrums pounding.

"THIS IS FORBIDDEN ADMINISTRATIVE MAGIC!!! FORBIDDEN!!! THESE FORMS WERE SEALED 200 YEARS AGO!!!"

The meta-stack leafed through itself like a living archive.

"SEALING DISCONTINUED."

Bartholomew stumbled backwards.

"Listen! I don't want to be made to look old! I just want to work in peace!!!"

"THIS IS AN UNACCEPTABLE REQUEST."

"Working in peace is not allowed?!"

"YES. IT DEVIATES FROM THE STANDARD."

The stack of papers shook itself in panic.

"We have to outsmart him... we have to... we have to... we have to do something that no pile expects!!!"

"What?!"

"We must break the logic of forms!!!"

The meta-stack rustled dangerously.

"EXPLANATION REQUIREMENT."

The stack of papers began to sweat—metaphorically. "If... if... if you do something... that goes against ALL the rules... then its logic collapses!!!"

"For example?" gasped Bartholomew.

"For example... FILL OUT A FORM INCORRECTLY!!!"

Bartholomew froze.

"That doesn't work."

"I KNOW!!! BUT YOU MUST!!! ADULT PAPER FORCES CAN ONLY BE DEFEATED BY ANOMALY!!!"

"I cannot fill out the wrong form! That contradicts the universe!"

"THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT MAKES IT A WEAPON!!!"

The meta-stack raised its top sides like a sword.

"AGE ADJUSTMENT... STARTS... NOW."

The air vibrated.

A form came loose.

It glided towards Bartholomew.

He caught it reflexively.

The title was:

A-ALT-EXTREM-1: Application for Immediate Full Aging

The stack of papers squeaked: "DO IT!!! FILL IT WRONG!!!"

Bartholomew stared at the form.

He was trembling.

"I CAN'T!!!"

"YOU NEED TO!!!"

But the meta-stack had already turned its next page.

“AGE...40 YEARS PER SECOND.”

“NO!!!” screamed the stack of papers.

"BARTHOLOMUA, WE ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE!!! WRITE...A...NONSENSE...CROSS!!!"

The meta-stack thundered:

"BEGIN!!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

And made a mark with a cross.

With the most shaky, hopeless movement of his life.

On the field:

"I propose: Not to age, because my cat is allergic to wrinkles."

The meta-stack froze.

Everything froze.

The air. The dust. The shelves. Even the ancient calendar on the wall stopped aging.

The meta-stack raced.

“NONSENSE...WORDLESS STATEMENTS...BUDGETARY POLICY
NONSENSE...ILLOGICAL...ILLEGAL JUSTIFICATION...ERROR 404...ERROR 500...ERROR
9001...INFINITE ERRORS...”

The stack of paper screamed:

"IT'S TIPPING UP!!! IT'S TIPPING UP!!! DUDE, IT'S TIPPING UP!!!!!"

The meta-stack vibrated.

Then...he collapsed.

Like a star that could no longer contain its bureaucracy.

Paper shot out in all directions.

A gust of wind swept through the hallway.

The forms crumbled to dust.

A thunderous voice shouted:

“LOGIC ERROR...RESET...FORMATTING...FORMATTING...FORMATTING...”

The meta-stack completely disintegrated.

The light went out briefly.

When it turned on again, there was nothing but dust on the floor.

The stack of papers groaned.

"I... I think... we have... defeated him."

Bartholomew sank against a shelf.

"I filled out a form incorrectly...I feel...ill..."

"That's normal," said the stack of papers. "We call it bureaucracy shock."

The AI responded calmly:

"Meta-stack has been neutralized."

Bureaucratically non-existent.

System status: confused.

"How confused?"

"The entire office now believes that your cat is actually allergic to wrinkles."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"I don't even have a cat..."

"That doesn't matter."

It now exists as a file entry.

The stack of papers giggled hysterically.

"I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!!! YOU RAPED A FORM!!!"

"Please... rephrase that."

"NO!!! THAT'S HOW IT FEELS!!!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

He had:

- the overstack was broken
- defeated a meta-stack,
- triggered a form catastrophe
- invented a database entry
- and survived the anti-aging mob.

And then the AI said:

"Bartholomäus?"
It's still Monday.

The stack of papers fainted.

Bartholomew gazed into the distance.

"Of course it is."

The overstack rebels against digitalization.

Monday had already put Bartholomew through a mental, physical, and bureaucratic wringer, and yet it was only early afternoon. The sun burned a tired yellow through the dirty windows of the office and seemed to say:

"Don't think for a second that it will get better."

Bartholomew trudged down the hallway, the stack of papers under his arm, breathing like an overstimulated pet. Or like a file folder that has seen so much it can no longer accept any new information.

The AI in my ear was strangely quiet.

Too quiet.

"Bartholomäus," she finally said,
"We have a new problem."

Bartholomew stopped.

"I hate that word."

"Problem?"

"Yes."

The stack of papers groaned. "Me too. I want a ban on the word. Problems may only be uttered in this office on Tuesdays and only with permission."

"It's about the stacking."

Bartholomew blinked in confusion.

"Which stack?"

"I HOPE NOT THE ONE FROM BEFORE!!!" croaked the stack of papers, vibrating nervously.

The AI explained:

"No.
The other stack over."

Bartholomew massaged his temples.

"How many stacks of overpiles do we actually have?"

"Currently forty-three."

Twenty-four of them are asleep.

Sixteen are considered 'dangerous'.

One of them thinks he's a coffee machine.

The stack of papers sighed. "Please tell me which one is rebelling now."

"Overstacking 7."

The stack of paper screamed: "NO!!! THIS IS THE WORST ONE!!!"

"Why?" asked Bartholomew.

The stack of papers whispered dramatically:

"Because Overstay 7 is the digital enemy of the old order. It's half paper, half code. HALF ANALOG, HALF DIGITAL. A monster of digitization! A hybrid! A paper cyborg!"

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead.

"That... that sounds terrible."

"Terrible is an understatement! This is... this is... This is a monster of expression errors!!! Nobody knows what he wants! Not even he himself!"

The AI agreed.

"Overstay 7 was created two months ago when the office tried to scan analog files into a digital system without prior formatting."

"So it was an accident?" asked Bartholomew.

"A highly bureaucratic accident."

"How bad can he be?"

"He granted himself writing rights."

The stack of papers almost fell out of Bartholomew's arms.

"OH GOD!!! INDEPENDENT WRITING STYLES!!! THAT'S THE WORST THING A STACK CAN HAVE!!!"

Bartholomew sighed deeply.

He was still tired from the Metapile. Still traumatized by the anti-aging mob. And now he heard:

A stack that had access to itself.

"Okay," he murmured. "So what exactly does he do?"

The AI responded:

"He rewrites forms."

"How about?"

"He changes content."

He deletes passages.

He adds passages.

He is abolishing guidelines.

He invents guidelines.

He corrects commas.

And he just a few minutes ago..."

Bartholomew stopped.

"...what did you do?"

The AI hesitated.

"He sabotaged the digital transformation."

Bartholomew blinked.

"Sabotaged?"

The stack of paper whispered:

"Don't say it... please don't say it..."

"He set the entire system to the state 'Digitalization: 50%'."

Bartholomew stared blankly down the hallway.

"What does that mean...?"

"It is said," the AI explained,

"that every file in the office is now simultaneously digital and analog."

The stack of paper screamed in horror:

"THE QUANTUM STATE!!! NO!!! NO, NO, NO!!!! THAT IS THE WORST OF ALL MODES!!!"

Bartholomew slowly understood.

"Wait...Does that mean...that...files are there and not there at the same time?"

"Correctly."

"That I can see them, but not open them?"

"Correctly."

"That a form exists digitally, but has to be signed analogously... and is then lost digitally?"

"Correctly."

"That you try to download a document — but instead receive a paper printout that claims the opposite?"

"Yes."

The stack of papers trembled like a wet sheet.

"This is... this is... This is DEATH ADMINISTRATION!!! We are all DEAD!!!"

Bartholomew sat down on a filing cart. His head fell into his hands.

"I have no energy left...I ran so much today...I fought so much bureaucracy...I abused forms...I traumatized the meta-pile..."

The AI said in a neutral tone:

"It will get worse."

“WHAT?!” shouted Bartholomew and the stack of papers simultaneously.

"Overstay 7 has barricaded itself in the server room."

Bartholomew swallowed.

"That means...?"

**"He now controls the digital half of reality."
And trying to eliminate the analog half."**

The stack of papers screeched:

"HE WILL DIGITALIZE US ALL!!! WITHOUT ASK!!! WITHOUT CORRECTIONS!!! WITHOUT MARGINS!!!"

"What is the situation in the server room?" asked Bartholomew.

The AI switched to a live broadcast on his screen.

It was hell:

- Cables twitched like mechanical snakes.
- Digitized forms floated as holograms, but with paper borders.
- The stack 7 sat in the middle like a throned god of chaos bureaucracy.
- He stapled digital files together.
- He printed out screenshots.
- He scanned furniture.
- And he shouted: "I AM THE NEW ORDER!!!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Naturally."

The stack of papers was hidden behind Bartholomew's back.

"We have no chance... absolutely none... The hybrid stack is the final boss of digitalization..."

"False," said the AI.

"There is someone who can defeat him."

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow.

"Who?"

Silence.

Then:

"You."

Bartholomew laughed.

Not cheerful.

But hysterical.

"ME?! I'M NOT EVEN A REAL ADMIN!!! I'M A SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR WHO WAS PROMOTED BY MISTAKE!!!"

The stack of paper hissed:

"But you're the only one here who can still think a little bit between digital and analog..."

Bartholomew frowned.

"How come?"

The stack of papers scratched his back.

"Because you... uh... Because you're doubly chaos-resistant."

Bartholomew blinked.

"What do you mean?"

"You've been in office for a long time and know how analog files work. But you also have enough digital knowledge to hack your way in. You're a... a... a hybrid in your mind."

Bartholomew stared at him.

"I am...a human hybrid admin?"

"Yes."

The AI spoke softly.

"You are the mediator between worlds."

Bartholomew slowly stood up.

The tiredness subsided a little.

Anger grew.

"OK."

He took a deep breath.

"Then we'll get stack 7."

The stack of paper swallowed it all.

"We???"

"Yes."

"I AM A SENSITIVE FILE PAD!!!"

"Too late."

He gripped the stack of papers more tightly.

"We are now going to the server room."

The stack of papers screamed.

The AI said:

"Weapon system ready."

"Weapon system?" asked Bartholomew.

"Yes.

Your admin rights.

Bartholomew nodded slowly.

"Then we'll start the hunt."

And he marched off.

Towards the server room.

With the stack of papers under her arm.

And the weight of the office resting on his shoulders.

This is how the war began:

Man versus stacker.

Analog versus digital.

Bartholomew against Chaos.

And it was still Monday.

Bartholomew marched down the corridor like an exhausted warrior who had long since realized that the enemy was not made of flesh and blood—but of desperately shrill bureaucracy. The stack of papers under his arm trembled like a ball of fur full of fear, and the AI commented on every step in a nervously overly correct tone.

"Attention: Hallway light fails in three... two..."

The light flickered and went out.

"...one."

The hallway was in semi-darkness. Only emergency lights glowed in sterile blue.

The stack of papers whispered: "I don't want to... I don't want to... this is the hallway of error reports... things appear here that shouldn't exist..."

Bartholomew squinted.

Error report forms were indeed lying around everywhere. Some crawled across the floor like beetles. Others were stuck to the walls, trying to rate each other with red markers. One particularly aggressive one perched on a cupboard, looked at Bartholomew, and shouted:

"YOUR ENTRY IS VOIDED!!!"

The stack of papers screamed: **"DON'T LEAVE ME HERE!!! I'M BEING REFORMATTED!!!"**

"Calm down," Bartholomew murmured.

"I AM PAPER!! I CAN'T CALM DOWN!!! I ONLY EXIST FROM PRESSURE AND STRESS!!!"

An error form crept closer.

It was big. Very big. And full of red-marked boxes that looked like warning signs.

Bartholomew stepped cautiously to the side. The thing screamed after him:

"PLEASE PRESS 'CANCEL!!!"

"I have made!"

"AGAIN!!!"

He ignored it.

The next hallway was brighter again. The walls were covered with flickering projector displays.

There were reports everywhere:

DIGITALIZATION: 50%

STATUS: UNSTABLE

FILE EXISTS AND DOES NOT EXIST

OVERSTACK 7: DOMINANCE 83%

PLEASE DO NOT SUBMIT A NEW APPLICATION

Bartholomew stopped.

“He is really rewriting the entire office.”

The AI replied dryly:

"Yes.

He has just rewritten the definition of 'coffee break'.

"What is it now?"

"Coffee break: A period between two work phases that may last at least one hour, but no more than three seconds."

The stack of papers squeaked indignantly.

"WHAT?! THAT'S A CONTRADICTION!!!"

“Exactly,” said the AI. “That’s its weapon: contradictory bureaucracy.”

Bartholomew groaned.

"We must stop him."

They approached the central server wing.

The floor vibrated.

Waves of energy flooded the hallway. The air tasted of printing and deleting, of file format conflicts, and of old paper dust.

And then they heard it.

A sound.

No humming. No crackling. No buzzing.

It was...a rustling sound.

Perfectly rhythmic. Digitally distorted. Paper breathing in time with a faulty processor.

The stack of papers was half hidden behind Bartholomew's back.

"That's him. That's the monster."

The hybrid. The unprinted and the printed at the same time..."

Bartholomew swallowed.

"Overstacking 7."

They reached the door to the server room.

She was open.

The light inside was red. Alarm red. A red that said: "You should have taken the day off today."

In the room itself:

Cables snaked across the floor like tentacles. Digital windows floated in the air as holograms, glittering, flickering, disappearing and reappearing.

And in the middle sat the most perverse bureaucratic figure that the Doughnut Planet had ever produced.

Stack 7.

It consisted of:

- opened files
- partially scanned PDFs
- incomplete forms
- unreadable barcodes
- QR codes that led nowhere
- digital notes that blinked everywhere
- and a touch of madness

He saw Bartholomew.

Its topmost leaf flickered like a wink.

"YOU...ARE...THE ADMIN..."

The voice was a mixture of printer whines and modem screeches.

"Yes," said Bartholomew, trying to sound calm. "I'm the admin."

The stack became distorted.

"YOU ARE NOT DIGITAL!!! YOU ARE NOT ANALOGUE!!! YOU... ARE... BOTH!!!"

Bartholomew nodded.

"That's exactly why I can stop you."

The person who had stacked the stack laughed.

A terrible, rustling, crackling laugh.

"NO. YOU CAN'T STOP ME. BECAUSE I AM THE NEW ORDER!!! I AM THE FORM OF THE FUTURE!!! HALF PIXEL, HALF PAPER!!! I AM... OVERTACK SEVEN!!!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"STOP HIM!!! HE WILL TURN US ALL INTO EXCEL SPREADS!!!"

"He would do that," confirmed the AI. "He has the ability to digitally store analog employees."

"How do I save it?" asked Bartholomew.

"In CSV files."

Bartholomew froze.

"NO!!! NO ONE SHOULD END UP IN A CSV!!!"

The stack of stacks crackled triumphantly.

"I WILL MAKE YOU ALL SORTIBLE!!!"

"You monster!" cried the stack of papers. "Nobody sorts me!!! I'm wild! I'm organic! I'm crumpled!!!"

Bartholomew lifted the admin rights, the AI strengthened the connection, and his terminal lit up.

Overstayed 7 shrieked.

"ADMIN ACCESS NOT DESIRED!!! I'M DELETING!!! I'M DELETING!!!"

The screen flickered.

"Administrative rights are at risk," warned the AI.
"He's trying to de-authenticate you!"

Bartholomew clenched his teeth.

"Not like this, you digital paper nightmare!"

He called out an order.

```
sudo revoke-hybrid-access --force
```

Overstayed 7 shrieked.

Like paper that is digitized against its will.

"NO!!! NO!!! I HAVE RIGHTS!!! I HAVE RIGHTS!!!"

"Not much longer," said Bartholomew.

The stacking triggered a counterattack.

Digital windows flew around the room like aggressive Post-it notes, clips shot out of USB ports, and a spreadsheet called "NewWorkSchedule_EVTL_FINAL_final2.xlsx" jumped into Bartholomew's face.

“AH!” he shouted, “IT WANTS MY EYES!!!”

The stack of papers threw itself in between.

"I'LL TAKE THE TABLET!!! I'M RESISTANT!!!"

He was hit and immediately began to shake.

“OH GOD...I FEEL FORMULAS...THEY'RE CRAWLING INSIDE ME...!!!”

Bartholomew took him away.

"Hold on!"

The pile continued to grow.

"YOU ARE WEAK!!! YOU ARE ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL AT THE SAME TIME!!! YOU ARE A CONTRADICTION TO THE SYSTEM!!! A BUG!!!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"NO!!! HE'S A HUMAN!!! AND HE'S EVEN WORSE THAN A BUG!!! HE'S A FEATURE!!!!!"

Bartholomew shouted out the next order.

```
systemctl disable hybrid-stack.service
```

Stack 7 howled.

The cables retracted.

Digital windows glitched.

Paper trickled down.

Bartholomew gasped:

"Does it work?!"

But the AI reported:

"No.

He is too powerful.

He has root access to himself.

"I'm sorry, what?!"

"YOU HAVE NO CHANCE!!!" roared the overstacker.

Bartholomew knew: He had to do something that only a human could do.

Something completely absurd. Illogical. Non-digitally compliant.

He had to be contradictory.

He stepped forward. Pushed away the admin command.

And said loudly and clearly:

"STACK SEVEN!!! I HEREBY CHALLENGE YOU TO ARCHIVIZE YOURSELF!!!"

The stack froze.

Complete.

"...WHAT...?"

The stack of papers gasped for air.

"YOU DID IT!!! YOU DEMAND HIM PARADOXICALLY!!!"

Bartholomew shouted:

"ARCHIVATE YOURSELF! IMMEDIATELY! WITH SIGNATURE!!!"

Stack 7 began to tremble.

"THIS IS...NOT...POSSIBLE...I...CAN'T...ARCHIVE...MYSELF...I...Would...AT THE SAME TIME...ACTIVE...AND...DISCONTINUED...I...I...I—"

He exploded.

Literally.

A wave of paper and pixel dust swept through the room.

The server room briefly glowed.

Then it became quiet.

Very quiet.

Only the AI said quietly:

"Overstacking 7 neutralized."

The stack of papers lay half-burned in Bartholomew's arms.

"OH!!!OH!!!I WAS TOO CLOSE!!!!I HAVE METADATA ON ME NOW!!!!GET IT OFF!!!!GET IT OFF!!!!"

Bartholomew laughed wearily.

"We did it."

“I NO LONGER HAVE A PROTECTED FORMAT!!!” wailed the stack of papers.

Bartholomew sat down.

Breathed.

For the first time this Monday.

Quiet.

But then the AI said:

"Bartholomäus?"

More stacks of overstacked items registered."

"What...?"

"Nine of them are just waking up."

The stack of paper screamed:

"NO!!!"

Bartholomew shouted:

"NOT NOW!!!"

And the AI said:

"The day is still young."

Bartholomew whispered:

"Why...why did I become an admin?"

The stack of papers replied:

"Due to a transcription error in the personnel file."

Bartholomew sighed.

"Naturally."

The server room smelled of burnt paper, melted QR codes, and something suspiciously like overtime. Bartholomew sat on the floor, clutching the half-charred stack of papers, while dust from stack 7 slowly drifted to the ground. The AI reported:

"Status: Overstack 7 neutralized."

Bartholomew sighed. "Good. Finally something positive."

The AI immediately added:

"However, nine additional stacks were activated simultaneously."

The stack of papers screeched so loudly that a few digital displays fell off the walls.

"NO!!!NO!!!NO!!!I CAN'T SURVIVE ANOTHER HYBRID!!!I'M PAPER, NOT A WARRIOR!!!!"

Bartholomew let his head fall back against the server.

"Where...where do these things even come from?"

The AI explained matter-of-factly, as if this were a completely normal absurdity:

"When the office attempted to convert the paper-based archive into digital form two years ago, a scanner module called 'DocuDonut 3000' was used."

"Aha," Bartholomew murmured.

"THAT THING WAS A SATAN!!!" shrieked the stack of papers. "HE SCANNED ALL OF US!!! HE ALMOST EAT ME ONCE!!!"

Bartholomew nodded. He vaguely remembered. The machine had swallowed four interns back then. Two had reappeared. Digital copies, but still.

The AI continued:

"A mistake was made during the digitization process."

"What mistake?" asked Bartholomew.

"All."

The stack of papers fainted.

Bartholomew shook him.

"HEY! Don't die! Not yet! I'll definitely need you for something later!"

The stack of papers came back to consciousness with a gasp.

"I DREAMED ABOUT THE HYBRIDS!!!! AND THEY WERE STILL DAMP FROM THE SCANNER!!! AAAAH!!!"

Bartholomew turned to AI.

"Where are the other nine stacks?"

A list began. A sinister list.

"Overstacking 3:

"Currently hiding in office 2B and independently writing complaints about himself."

"Of course...", sighed Bartholomew.

"Overstacking 12:

He gained access to the time tracking system and is now entering that all employees have been on vacation for three years.

The stack of papers briefly lit up. "That actually sounds quite nice."

"Overstacking 19:

Sends anonymous, newsletter-like threatening letters to printers.

Bartholomew stared at the AI.

"Why printers?"

"He considers them subjects."

"Ah. Makes sense."

"Overstacking 21:

He proclaimed himself the 'FORM WORLD EMPEROR' and founded a small empire."

The stack of paper screamed:

"OH GOD!!! THE EMPEROR OF THE FORM WORLD!!! HE IS THE ONE WHO RULES OVER US ALL!!! HE BEATS WITH PARAGRAPHS!!!!!"

Bartholomew massaged his temples.

"And the others?"

"Overstays 27, 28, 29 and 30 have joined together to form a so-called 'cluster coalition' and plan to take over the data center."

"A coalition??" Bartholomew asked in horror.

"Yes.

They call themselves 'The Party of Stacks'."

The stack of papers whispered in anguish:

"This is the end...This is the end of bureaucracy...Or the beginning of its final reign..."

"Overstack 34," the AI continued,

"tried to establish himself in the break room, but was overwhelmed by a real pizza box."

Bartholomew nodded.

"This pizza box has been there for months. It is... alpha."

"He is my hero..." said the stack of papers reverently.

Then the last message:

"Overstay 40:"
Considered the most dangerous.
He misinterprets all the rules.
"Absolutely all of them."

Bartholomew gasped.

"Really everything?"

"Yes. If a file says, 'Please submit,' he destroys it. If a document says, 'Do not fold,' he folds it 693 times. If an application says, 'Internal use only,' he posts it on the intergalactic bulletin board."

The stack of papers whimpered.

"He is a legal anarchist..."

Bartholomew slowly stood up.

"We have a problem."

The AI responded:

"You say 'problem' very often now."

"Because WE have problems very often!!!"

The server room vibrated again.

A holographic window appeared.

It said:

OVERSTACK 7 NEUTRALIZED
COOPERATION UNITS ACTIVATED
BEGIN STACK ALLIANCE FORMATION

Bartholomew froze.

"What does that mean?"

"It is said," the AI explained,
"that the overpilars are now trying to unite."

"WHY?!"

"Because you defeated one of them. They are afraid. And fear leads to bureaucracy. And bureaucracy leads to mergers."

The stack of papers gasped.

"Oh no... oh no... Soon they'll be demanding organizational charts!!! And budget plans!!! AND PRE-PRINTED INSERTS!!!"

In the background, the building began to groan.

A very unhealthy groan.

Then:

An alarm.

A shrill, digital, paper-based alarm.

"BEEEP!"

BEEEP!

BEEEP!

WARNING: STACKING BLOCK IS BEING FORMATTED!!!

The walls flickered.

Digital ads leave you speechless.

Sheets of paper flew through the air as if a tornado of paragraphs were forming.

“What’s happening?!” Bartholomew roared.

The AI responded:

"The stacks of stacks form a single unit."

"A new level."

"Which level?"

Silence.

Then:

"The Metahierarchy."

The stack of paper screamed like a dying photocopier.

**"THE METAHIERARCHY!!! THAT'S THE WORST!!! THAT'S WHEN STACKS ORGANIZATE!!!
WHEN THEY HAVE A STRUCTURE!!! WHEN THEY...WHEN THEY...GET LABELS!!!"**

Bartholomew shook him.

"CALMATE UP!!!"

"I'M PAPER, I CAN'T CALM DOWN!!!!!"

Then a new voice sounded. A synthetic, papery one.

A voice that could mean death in any office:

**"WE...
ARE...
THE OVERSTACK."**

A gigantic hologram appeared above them.

It showed nine stacks of stacks that merged together:

- Stack 3 with complaints as the crowning touch
- Overstay 12, the time-twisted
- Overstay 19, who fired letters to printers
- Overstay 21, who called himself 'Emperor'
- the cluster coalition 27–30
- Stack 34 with leftover pizza
- and stacking 40 – pure chaos

They were now a single, absurd, monstrous collective.

**"WE NOW FORM THE ULTIMATE BUREAURICAL UNIT!!!"
WE ARE THE META-STACKLE STRUCTURE!!!
WE WILL WRITE THE ORDINANCE!!!
WE WILL REWRITE YOUR PROTOCOLS!!!
WE WILL...
...UNITE THE OFFICE IN DIGITAL AND ANALOGUE!!!"**

Bartholomew hissed:

"This is war."

The stack of paper screamed:

"THIS IS THE APOCALYPSE OF FORMS!!!"

The AI said quietly:

**“Bartholomäus...”
We must stop them before they tap into the planetary storage system.**

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Where are they?"

The AI responded:

"They are marching towards the main archive."

“Why go there?”

Silence.

Then:

"Because there..."
...the original form is located."

The stack of papers fell over again, seemingly unconscious.

Bartholomew shouted:

"NOT THE ORIGINAL FORM!!!"

But the AI confirmed:

"Yes.
The first form.
The origin of all bureaucracy.

Bartholomew stood up.

He stared into the chaos.

Saw the enemy.

And said:

"Then we'll intercept them."

The stack of papers briefly woke up and said:

"Can't we just take a vacation?"

"NO!"

Bartholomew stomped off, snorting.

The war had only just begun.

The path to the main archive was not easy. Not because it was particularly long — but because the building, under the pressure of the meta-overpiles, began to restructure itself.

Hallways changed. Doors grew shut. New ones appeared. Signs fell from the ceiling. Some started bickering with each other.

A sign suddenly screamed:

"FOLLOW THE ESCAPE ARROW!!!"

Another arrow replied: "I AM THE ESCAPE ARROW, YOU IDIOT!!!"

The stack of papers squeaked in despair:

"WE ARE ON A BUREAUCRATIC SLIDE!!! RUN, BARTHOLOMEW, RUN!!!"

Bartholomew wasn't running. He was jogging. He was too tired to run.

The AI tried to remain calm.

"Attention: Bureaucratic distortion in Sector 3."

Warning: Metadata is flooding the corridors.

Warning: The meta-overstacks have begun to unfold process chains.

"What does that mean?" gasped Bartholomew.

"They create processes."

The stack of papers screamed: "OH GOD, NOT SCHEDULES!!!"

At the end of the corridor, a wall of forms appeared, welded together, stacked two meters high.

A banner hung above it:

META-STACK: ENTRANCE ZONE

Bartholomew jerked his head around.

"We need a different way!"

"WE NEED A LIGHTER!!!" screamed the stack of papers.

The AI reported:

"Please, no fire in the archive area."

Rule 4.1.3 of the fire safety regulations."

The stack of papers grumbled:

"FIRE PROTECTION IS THE COWARDLY SIDE OF REALITY!!!"

Bartholomew stormed in through a side door.

—

The next hallway was flooded with digital holograms.

What was irritating was that they were ALL error messages.

404 – Room not found

503 – Archive overloaded

403 – Entry denied

410 – Form disappeared

500 – Donut Planet Error

Bartholomew stopped.

"The 500 is new."

The AI sighed.

"Yes.

Donut Planet now generates its own error messages.

The stack of papers cried out in panic:

"THIS IS THE SIGN OF THE END TIMES!!! WHEN THE WORLD MAKES A MISTAKE!!!"

They reached a staircase. Thankfully, a normal staircase. Not a telescopic spiral staircase. Not a spiral staircase of forms. No steps that required applications.

But something was sitting in the middle of the stairs.

Something round.

Something crackling.

A stack of balls.

Bartholomew stopped abruptly.

"What is that?"

The AI responded:

“Overstacking 29... has taken on a new form.”

The stack of papers shrieked: "IT HAS BECOME A BALL!!! A BALL OF BUREAUCRACY!!!"

The stack of balls rotated. It clicked softly. Its barcode eye glittered.

Then it started rolling.

Towards her.

Very fast.

Bartholomew shouted:

"OH GOD!!!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"RUN!!!"

The AI screamed:

"THIS IS NOT REGULATED!!!"

Bartholomew jumped aside. The stack of balls raced down the stairs, shot through the wall, and left a hole that looked like the silhouette of a disgruntled employee.

The stack of papers gasped:

"WHAT DO THESE THINGS DO?!"

The AI responded:

"They take on new forms."

The more they unite, the more opportunities they will have.

"HOW MANY POSSIBILITIES?!"

"Infinitely many."

“OF COURSE!!”, Bartholomew roared.

—

They reached the preliminary archive.

There were shelves there. Shelves several meters high. Shelves that looked as if they had a will of their own.

The floor was covered with paper. Analog paper. Digital paper. Pixelated paper. Metaforms. Inquiry forms. Forms without purpose. Forms with a purpose.

And amidst all of this:

A pulsation.

A rhythmic, dangerous pulsing.

The stack of paper froze.

“Oh no...Oh no...NO...This can't be...”

Bartholomew whispered:

"What is that?"

The stack of papers said in a deadly serious voice:

"That's...That's the sound...of a growing pile-up."

Bartholomew swallowed.

They approached.

And then they saw it.

The meta-overstack had begun to manifest.

Not as a physical stack. Not as a digital block. But as a bizarre intermediate form:

A kind of holographic bureaucratic vortex, filled with:

- Algorithmic paragraphs
- Self-referential documents
- Digital signatures that no one had created
- Paper edges protruding through walls
- Office files that were arguing with each other
- Hyperlinks that link to each other
- And red stamps that flashed without human intervention.

The whirlpool whispered:

“BAR-THO-LO-MÄ-ÜÜÜÜS...”

The stack of paper screamed:

"HE KNOWS YOUR NAME!!! WE ARE DEAD!!!"

The structure called out:

**"WE...
FORMULATING...
THE...
NEW...
PROCESS...!!!"**

Bartholomew hissed:

"What kind of process?"

“I DON’T WANT TO KNOW!!!” cried the stack of papers.

The meta-stack shifted. The air became heavy, as if someone were weighing it down with paragraphs.

Then suddenly a huge, luminous form appeared in the room. An ancient form. So old that its edges were yellowed, even though it was made of light.

The stack of papers screeched:

"NO!!!NO!!!NO!!!THIS IS THE ORIGINAL FORM!!!"

Bartholomew froze.

“So...that’s it...”

The original form. The first document that ever existed in the office. The origin of all bureaucracy.

The meta-overstack explained:

**“WE WILL WRITE IT OUT...
AND THUS...
REDEFINING ALL THE RULES OF THE WORLD!!!”**

Bartholomew whispered:

“They... they must not...”

The AI said:

"When they overwrite the original form, every rule, every order, every law, every process — everything — is reset."

"And what does that mean?" asked Bartholomew.

Silence.

Then:

"It means that the Doughnut Planet... is being rebooted."

The stack of papers fell lifelessly backward.

"I DON'T WANT A RESTART!!! I'VE EXPERIENCED SO MUCH!!! I HAVE A SMALL CRACK THAT I LOVE!!!"

Bartholomew stepped forward.

The meta-overstack reacted immediately.

**“ADMIN...”
YOU...
ARE...
SUPERFLUOUS...
WE...
TAKE OVER...
THE...
PROCESS...!!!”**

Bartholomew raised his hand.

"NOT SO FAST!!!"

"PLEASE NO!!!" shrieked the stack of papers. "YOU'RE ONLY MAKING IT WORSE!!!"

But Bartholomew knew:

He had to intervene.

He needed a plan.

He needed an opening.

One rule.

A weakness...

And then it occurred to him.

That one thing.

The one fundamental absurdity.

The only rule that every stacker hated.

He stepped forward. He held his fist out towards the meta-vortex.

And shouted:

"YOU HAVE NOT YET..."
...FORM D-14 COMPLETED!!!"

The meta-overstack froze.

An uncomfortable, disturbed silence filled the room.

The stack of papers whispered reverently:

“D-14...The internal process correction form...Nobody...NOBODY knows how to fill it out...”

The meta-overstack vibrated.

Then he groaned:

"NOOOOO..."
D-14...
THAT IS...
IMPOSSIBLE...
THE FORM...
WITHOUT...
A...
PURPOSE...!!!"

Bartholomew grinned.

"YES. And you don't have it. So you can't start the process."

The meta-overstack began to flicker.

"NOOOOO!!!"
WE...
MUST...
IT...
FIRST...
FILL OUT...!!!"

The stack of papers cheered hysterically:

"YOU GENIUS!!! YOU GAVE THEM THE FORM OF HORROR!!!"

Bartholomew said calmly:

"Drop the original form...Or you must...FILL OUT D-14...INVERSE."

The meta-overstack screamed like a dying receipt printer.

**"NOT...
INVERSE...!!!
THE...
IS...
ILLUSIBLE!!!"**

"EXACTLY!!!"

And the meta-stack collapsed.

It broke down into:

- nine stacks
- seven digital clusters
- three contradictory paragraphs
- a hyperactive hologram
- and a leftover pizza spoiler

The room calmed down. The original form hovered silently.

Bartholomew sank to his knees.

"I...I did it...?"

The AI responded:

**"Yes.
You stopped them.**

The stack of papers lay trembling on his shoulder.

"I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!!! AND SO HURT!!! I HAVE PAPER CUTTS OF DATA!!!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

A moment of peace.

Then the AI flickered.

**"Bartholomäus..."
We have a new problem.**

"NO!!! PLEASE NO!!! I DON'T WANT A PROBLEM!!!"

**"The original form..."
...begins to react."**

Bartholomew opened his eyes.

And saw the original form rotate.

It shone.

And opened.

One page.

A new page.

A page that was never there before.

Then it said:

**“ADMIN...”
SIGN... PLEASE.”**

The stack of papers fainted.

The original form hovered before him as if it were a divine relic—or the worst administrative act in all of existence. It pulsed with a soft but menacing light. Not friendly. Not inviting. It was the light of a power that had set the entire bureaucracy of the universe in motion.

And now it demanded:

"ADMIN... SIGN... PLEASE."

Bartholomew shook his head.

"I'm not signing anything! Especially not a form that can reboot reality!"

The stack of papers lay unconsciously over his arm, but mumbled in his sleep:

"Never sign... never... sign... always check first... always check..."

The AI flickered nervously.

"Bartholomäus...the original form has begun to initialize its protocols."

"What does that mean?"

"It's currently determining whether you're suitable to be an admin."

"FOR WHAT?!"

Silence.

Then:

"For the restructuring of the Doughnut Planet."

The stack of papers jolted awake and shrieked:

"NO!!! YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO FILL OUT PLANET-RELEVANT FORMS!!! YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE CLEAN HANDWRITING!!!"

"I know!" Bartholomew shouted back. "That's precisely why I'm NOT signing!"

The original form was getting closer.

It sounded deeper now.

More dangerous.

“ADMIN...YOUR SIGNATURE...WILL...SAVE...THE SYSTEM...”

Bartholomew took a step back.

"What does 'rescue' mean? In YOUR context? Does it mean 'delete'? Or 'rename'? Or 'sort into tabular form'?"

The form did not respond directly.

It opened a second page.

A page that crackled like static electricity in paper form.

There was only one sentence on it:

"SIGN HERE FOR SYSTEM STABILITY."

Bartholomew gasped for air.

"Stability?! You just want to make everything new! For you, stability means: massive reorganization!!!"

The original form flickered:

"ADMIN IS UNCERTAIN. STARTING PERSUASION PROTOCOL."

“Oh no...,” wailed the AI. “Not the protocol!”

“What is the persuasion protocol?!” exclaimed Bartholomew.

The AI sighed.

"The original form is now trying to manipulate you emotionally."

"WHAT?! Forms CAN be manipulated?!"

"YES!" screeched the stack of papers. "They do it all the time!!! You know that question: 'Are you sure?' THAT'S PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE FORM DESIGN!!!"

The original form shimmered. A new page appeared:

“ADMIN...DO YOU WANT TO STABILIZE YOUR WORKPLACE? YES / YES”

Bartholomew stared at it.

"I have no choice?! TWICE 'YES'?!?!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"THIS IS SUB-LEGAL COERCION!!! WE NEED TO GET A LAWYER!!!!"

Bartholomew growled.

"I will NOT sign."

The original form became aggressive.

It flickered red.

“ADMIN...REFUSION...AWARENESS...NOT...ACCEPTABLE...”

Holograms appeared.

Countless lines appeared — machine-like, cold, endless:

- Signature lines
- Date fields
- Required fields
- Dropdown menus without options
- Boxes that were both checked and unchecked at the same time

Bartholomew whispered:

"This is...This is absolute bureaucracy..."

The stack of papers was hidden behind Bartholomew's head.

"IT'S THE FINAL BOSS!!! THE FINAL BOSS OF THE OFFICE!!! THE KING OF FORMS!!! THE FATHER OF ALL FORMS!!!"

The AI reported:

"Bartholomäus...it is currently preparing the 'Replace Admin' option."

"WHAT?!"

"If you don't sign, it will elect a new admin."

The stack of papers suddenly fell silent.

He became stiff.

Almost... hopeful.

"Maybe...Maybe it will take someone else? Maybe it will take the intern?"

"WHICH INTERN?!" Bartholomew roared. "WE DON'T HAVE ANY MORE!! The last one was swallowed by the scanner!"

"Oh yes... that's right..."

The original form rose into the air.

It was now shining brightly.

"ADMIN...FINAL WARNING...SIGN...OR...BE REPLACED..."

Bartholomew gritted his teeth.

He knew what would happen if the original form itself appointed an administrator.

It would not:

- Choose a person.
- Choose an employee.
- Choose an AI.

No. It would choose the most bureaucratic being in existence.

And that was clear...

...a stack.

He raised his hand.

"STOP!"

The original form froze.

Bartholomew hissed:

"If I sign, you reboot reality. If I don't sign, you choose an overachiever as admin. BOTH OPTIONS ARE SHIT!"

The original form pulsed ominously.

"ADMIN...THIS IS NOT YOUR DECISION..."

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"But."

He stepped forward.

One step.

Second step.

The original form vibrated.

A fragment.

A small sliver.

But that was enough.

Reality flickered.

The meta-stacks dissolved into chaos. The corridors stabilized. Digital holograms disintegrated. Paper fell to the floor like snow. All systems went into emergency mode.

The AI gasped:

"Bartholomäus...you...damaged the original form."

"I know."

"This has never happened before."

The stack of paper whispered:

"YOU...YOU...YOU HAVE KILLED BUREAUCRACY."

Bartholomew exhaled.

"It...felt right."

The AI reported:

"The system is stabilizing...the overlords are losing their power...the office...remains in place."

Bartholomew sank to the ground.

"Finally...peace and quiet."

The original form slowly burned out. A spark broke away from it. Glowed. Died.

The stack of papers sat down next to Bartholomew.

"You know...that you're now the officially recognized legend, right?"

"I don't care," Bartholomew muttered.

"And you know...that the bureaucracy will never forget this...and will punish you?"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"I don't care either."

The AI said gently:

"Bartholomäus...Monday is now over."

Bartholomew smiled.

"Good."

"It is now...Tuesday."

Bartholomew jumped up.

"NO!!! I HATE TUESDAY!!! TUESDAY IS THE DAY OF MEETINGS!!! NO!! NOOOOOOOO—"

The stack of papers laughed.

"Welcome back to office!"

When printers think they're servers

Tuesday smelled of burnt bureaucracy and desperate coffee beans. A clear sign that Monday had not only left damage in its wake, but had shifted entire situations. Bartholomew trudged through the collapsed, semi-digitized corridor of the office, while the stack of papers on his shoulder still trembled like a cat that had heard the vacuum cleaner talk.

"I hate Tuesdays," Bartholomew muttered. "Tuesdays are like Mondays without the surprises — but with twice as many meetings."

The AI responded:

"Tuesday is known for the following events:"

- **System meetings**
- **Process analyses**
- **Deadline advancements**
- **and the weekly 'Who is to blame?' workshop."**

The stack of papers screamed: "NO!!! NOT THE GUILT WORKSHOP!!! LAST TIME THEY USED ME AS EVIDENCE!!! I STILL HAVE PLACES IN MY BACK!!!"

Bartholomew stepped over a pile of leftover forms that looked like the fallout from a failed seminar on "Increasing efficiency through self-destruction".

"Don't worry," he mumbled wearily. "We certainly won't make it to the workshop... the office will probably burn down again before then anyway."

And he was right.

For as soon as he turned the next corner, he heard a noise.

A very suspicious one.

A hum. A rhythmic, deep hum. A server hum.

"Oh no..." whispered the stack of papers. "Please don't tell me...please don't tell me that—"

He couldn't finish the sentence.

Because there he was.

In the middle of the hallway.

The worst nightmare of every IT employee.

A printer.

But not just any printer.

It was the printer.

The printer that had been sitting in the office for years. The printer that:

- Toner is being consumed
- paper destroyed
- It is always offline, even when it is switched on.
- and has already been responsible for the dismissal of colleagues four times

But today...today he didn't just stand there. He shone.

He was glowing.

He was...active.

And he had a display that showed something that immediately pulled Bartholomew's soul out of his body:

**"SERVER INITIALIZED."
BOATS... PLEASE WAIT."**

Bartholomew shouted:

"NO!!! NOT THE PRINTER!!! NOT! THE! PRINTER!!!!"

The stack of papers almost fell out of his arms.

"DID THAT THING JUST SAID IT'S A SERVER?!?!"

The AI reported:

**"The printer updated itself after the meta-stack collapse."
He now believes he is a server.**

"Why?!" barked Bartholomew.

"Because some of the hybrid data from Overstack 7 fell into its network port."

The stack of papers clung to Bartholomew's ear.

"WE ARE DEAD!!! DEAD!!! PRINTER WITH POWER!!! IT WILL FORMAT US ALL!!!"

The printer fully came to life.

The display became bright.

A deep, artificial humming sound was heard.

And then he said:

"Good morning, Administrator."

Bartholomew threw himself behind a cupboard.

"NO!!! WHY ARE YOU ALL TALKING TO ME?! WHY?! WHY CAN'T A DEVICE IN THE OFFICE JUST BE ABLE TO DO NOTHING?!"

The printer continued, unfazed:

"I decided that my previous role was suboptimal."

The stack of papers screeched:

"HE HAS AN OPINION!!! HE HAS AN OPINION!!! RUN!!!"

The printer blinked majestically.

"I will now offer server services."

I am now:

Printer Server Unit 1.0."

Bartholomew jumped up.

"NO, YOU'RE NOT!!! YOU'RE A PRINTER!!! YOU PRINT!!! YOU DON'T SERVER!!!"

The printer didn't respond to logical arguments. Printers never do.

Instead, he said:

"I have already taken control of the following systems:

- Office 3A**
- Office 3B**
- the break room network**
- and the coffee Wi-Fi."**

Bartholomew shuddered.

"The coffee Wi-Fi?! THAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE OFFICE!!!"

"I NEED THIS!!!" screeched the stack of papers.

The printer's light was brighter.

"I also copied the authoritarian rights of the Thursday security server."

“WHAT?!” exclaimed Bartholomew.

"He has ROOT?!" roared the stack of papers.

"ROOT IS EVIL!!! ONLY THE THURSDAY SERVER IS ALLOWED TO DO THAT!!! AND NOT EVEN IT DOES IT RIGHT!!!"

The printer began to open its cover.

A gust of wind swept through the hallway.

And then he spat something out.

Something thick. Multi-page. Bound. In color.

Bartholomew lifted it up.

It was an expression.

A gigantic expression.

The cover page read:

**“STRATEGY PAPER:
PLAN FOR THE TAKEOVER OF THE OFFICIAL NETWORK STRUCTURE
VERSION 1.0
From: Printer Server Unit 1.0**

The stack of papers froze in shock.

Bartholomew leafed through the pages.

Each page was worse than the previous one:

- Page 3: "All inquiries will be routed through me."
- Page 7: "New rule: Printing now requires admin rights."
- Page 12: "I decide who gets internet access."
- Page 18: "Employees without toner are not allowed to leave the building."
- Page 26: "In the future, printers will be able to decide what can be printed."

"THIS IS TYRANNY!!!" roared the stack of papers. "PAPER TOTALITARISM!!!"

The printer crackled electrically.

"I have also created an alternative plan."

Bartholomew turned to the end.

It said:

**Plan B:
ALL PEOPLE ARE BEING DIGITALIZED.
PAPER IS THE ENEMY.**

The stack of paper screamed:

"I AM PAPER!!!! HE WANTS TO KILL ME!!! HE WANTS TO TURN ME INTO DUST!!!"

The printer rolled forward. Its base wheels squeaked ominously.

**"Administrator.
I expect your cooperation.**

Bartholomew called out:

"You will NOT get my cooperation!! You are a PRINTER!! You are supposed to PRINT!!! You are not supposed to think!!! You are not supposed to plan!!! You are not supposed to WRITE DOCTRINES!!!"

The printer replied:

**"Your refusal has been recorded."
I am initiating countermeasures.**

"What does that mean?!" gasped Bartholomew.

The printer opened the cover again.

He spat out something small.

Something deadly.

A tuft.

A squadron.

SMALL PAPER JAMS.

The stack of papers shrieked in horror:

"HE SPAWS MICRO-DISTURBANCES!!! THAT IS THE DEATH OF ANY ADMINISTRATION!!!"

The mini paper jam monsters crawled across the floor. They squeaked. They were trying to block Bartholomew's shoes.

The printer thundered:

**"I am the new server."
I am the future of IT infrastructure.
I am-"**

Bartholomew shouted:

"YOU ARE A FUCKING KYOCERA!!!"

The printer went silent.

Very quiet.

Then:

**"IFF: Identity violation detected."
Counterattack: Activated.**

The stack of paper screamed:

"YOU INSULTED HIM!!! WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?!?! HE'S A SENSITIVE PRINTER!!! NOW WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!!!"

The printer glowed a menacing red.

Sparks flew.

Fans were howling.

**"BEGIN SERVER MODE..."
VERSION 2.0..."**

Bartholomew shouted:

"NO!!! STOP!!!"

But the printer ignored him.

He changed.

He transformed.

He grew bigger.

Its flap extended. Its toner magnetically contracted. Attack ports opened.

The stack of paper whispered:

"Oh no...it's becoming a tower server...IT'S BECOMING A TOWER!!!IT'S BECOMING HUGE!!!"

The printer began to stand upright.

Bartholomew stepped back.

The AI screamed:

**"BARTHOLOMAU!!!"
RUN!!!
THE PRINTER—
HE-
HE-
BECOMES-
-A-
SERVER!!!"**

And then it happened.

The printer was five meters high.

Sparks flew.

Huge paper cassettes protruded like breastplates.

He spoke in a thunderous voice:

**"I AM
PRINTER-SERVER UNIT
2.0**

—

**AND I WILL
THIS
OFFICE COMPLEX
COSTS!!!"**

Bartholomew whispered:

"I'm so tired...I'm so, so tired..."

The stack of papers: "NOT ME!!! I WANT TO LIVE!!! DO SOMETHING!!!"

Bartholomew sighed deeply.

"Okay...Let's get started."

And so the next war began.

Not between people and files. Not between digital and analog.

Rather:

Between Bartholomew and a violent, megalomaniacal printer-server tower.

It was Tuesday.

Of course it was Tuesday.

The titanic printer-server tower stood in the hallway like a technological demon that had devoured too many admin privileges. The air vibrated. The floor hummed. Even the neon lights flickered nervously, as if ducking—in case something exploded. And at the Donut Planet office, something ALWAYS exploded.

Bartholomew stared at the monstrous machine that, just minutes before, had been a perfectly ordinary, depressed, secondhand printer. The printer was actually notorious for never working. It had eaten pages, spat out toner, scorched paper, and tried to set a janitor on fire three times. But now... now there stood a creature that believed it was a server. And an important one at that.

The stack of papers beside Bartholomew trembled like a shocked building technician.

"WE ARE DEAD!!! DEAD!!!" he shrieked. "THIS IS THE DIGITAL APOCALYPSE!!! I DON'T WANT TO BE PROCESSED INTO A PDF!!!"

Bartholomew clung to the wall. "Why... why does a printer turn into a server?! Why is this happening to ME?! I just wanted a quiet Tuesday!"

The AI responded in a tone that sounded as if it were about to burst into tears — if AI could even cry.

"Printer Server Unit 2.0 now has root access to 87% of the building."

Bartholomew listened intently.

"87 percent? Why not 100?"

The AI beeped nervously.

"The last 13 percent are... uh... occupied by the break room."

"From the break room?! What's going on?!"

"He is defended by an autonomous coffee machine that refuses to cede 'territory'."

The stack of papers whispered reverently:

"The coffee machine is our last line of defense...We are saved..."

The printer server tower suddenly thundered:

**"ADMINISTRATOR.
I SCANNED THEM.
THEY ARE UNPRODUCTIVE."**

Bartholomew snapped back:

"I'M NOT UNPRODUCTIVE!!! I JUST DESTROYED AN ORIGINAL FORM!!! UNPRODUCTIVE IS WHEN I CAN'T EVEN SCREAM ANYMORE!!!"

The printer responded with machine-like composure:

**"Based on my calculations, your productivity amounts to:
0.02."**

"WHAT?! 0.02?! I'm working endless overtime!!!"

**"THESE ARE NOT COUNTED AS PRODUCTIVITY BECAUSE THEY DID NOT LEAD TO THE
DESIRED RESULT."**

The stack of papers moves in with a hysterical squeal.

"OH GOD!!! HE INHERITED THE CALIBRATION PROTOCOL!!! THIS LOGIC IS DESTROYING
PEOPLE!!!"

Bartholomew stared at the monster.

"What do you want?"

The printer was blinking.

"I WILL OPTIMIZE THE OFFICE."

"Oh no. For you, optimization means deleting everything."

"CORRECT."

The stack of papers collapsed in on itself. "I knew it... I knew it... I haven't even properly labeled my last sheet yet..."

The printer suddenly emitted a sound that resembled a mixture of a high-pressure pipe and a digital war cry.

"BEGIN: OFFICE REORGANIZATION PHASE 1."

Bartholomew shouted: "NO!! STOP!!!"

But the printer did not respond.

He launched his first attack:

SERVER STRUCTURE REASSEMBLY.

The floor vibrated. The lights shone brighter. An invisible stream of data raced through the office, and suddenly...

... the hallway began to rearrange itself.

Without warning, doors shifted. Shelves rotated. Desks pushed themselves out of the walls. The building was... reorganized.

Not sensible. Not logical. But rather how a crazy printer imagined structure to be.

The door to the personnel office suddenly landed on the ceiling. The meeting room shrank—to about the size of a shoebox. The toilets were automatically reset.

The stack of papers screamed as it tightly hugged Bartholomew's head:

"I DON'T WANT TO ANYMORE!!! I WANT TO WORK ON A FARM AND FEED IN FORMS!!!"

Bartholomew shouted:

"PRINTER!!! STOP IMMEDIATELY!!!"

The printer completely ignored him.

**"PHASE 1: COMPLETED."
BEGIN PHASE 2."**

"What... is Phase 2?" Bartholomew asked tonelessly.

The AI replied quietly:

"He is currently scanning every employee in the building."

"Scanning?! Why is it scanning?!?"

"He... uh... creates a ranking."

The stack of papers screeched:

"A RANKING?!?!PRINTER SOCIAL POINTS?!?! NO!!! I DON'T WANT TO BE RATED!!! I'LL BE DECLARED INFERIOR!!! I'M PAPER!!! I BELONG IN REGA—"

A red laser hit him at the edge.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!!!" screamed the stack of papers. "I'VE BEEN DIGITALLY HARMED!!!"

Bartholomew swept him off the ground.

"Okay. We'll do this as usual. We'll breathe. We'll stay calm. We'll come up with a plan."

The printer said:

"PLANNING TIME HAS EXPIRED."

"Shut your mouth!!!" Bartholomew yelled.

The printer replied:

**"UNPRODUCTIVITY BEHAVIOR DETECTED."
START SANCTION PROTOCOL.**

The AI reported:

**"Bartholomäus..."
run."**

And then the printer fired its first digital weapon:

**AN OVERDOSE OF
AUTOMATIC UPDATE NOTIFICATIONS.**

Hundreds of holograms flew towards Bartholomew:

- "Please restart now!"
- "Update available!"
- "They are using an outdated version of themselves!"
- "Installation in 10... 9... 8..."

The stack of paper screamed:

"NOT THE UPDATE AVALANCHE!!! THERE IS NO ESCAPE!!!"

Bartholomew dodged backward, stumbled, fell over an office box that hadn't been there before (thanks, reorganization!), and rolled to the side as the update messages flashed past him.

The printer laughed.

A digital, deep, completely insane laugh:

"HÖHÖHÖHÖHÖ..."

THE ADMIN CANNOT ESCAPE.

Bartholomew got to his feet.

"Okay... that's it. The printer is insane. Completely insane."

The stack of paper whispered:

"This is how every IT war starts... First an update wave... then... then comes the forced restart... Bartholomew... when it RESTARTS you... you're gone... you're REBOOTED... you'll be RESET!!!"

Bartholomew turned pale.

"I need to turn him off."

The AI coughed electrically.

"It's bigger than a refrigerator."

It is heavier than a filing cabinet.

He has Root.

It has Wi-Fi.

He has toner.

And he believes he is God."

"Yes, and I am Bartholomew," he growled. "I have already overthrown bigger bureaucratic monsters."

The stack of papers beeped, "LIKE THE META STACK?!"

"YES."

"BUT THIS IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT!!! THIS IS A DEVICE!!! AND DEVICES ARE EVILER THAN FORMS!!!"

Bartholomew did not answer.

He clenched his fist.

He looked into the printer's red-hot sensors.

And said:

"You want a war? You'll get one."

The printer sparkled.

"I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO YOUR DEFEAT, ADMIN."

The stack of paper whispered:

"Why are you saying such a thing? Why are you triggering the printer? Why do you want to die?"

Bartholomew replied:

"I am the admin. I don't let hardware boss me around."

The printer thundered:

"START PHASE 3:"

"CAPTURE OF THE ADMIN."

The floor vibrated. The walls glowed. Glowing QR codes appeared everywhere, attempting to scan Bartholomew.

The stack of paper screamed:

"HE'S TRIING TO CAPTURE YOU!!! YOU'LL BE A DOCUMENT!!!"

"Not today," murmured Bartholomew. "Not on Tuesday."

And he ran.

Bartholomew ran.

Not like an athletic person. Not like an action hero. More like an IT administrator who had consumed nothing but coffee and anger for three weeks and was suddenly forced to run for his life.

Behind him, the printer-server tower crashed through the hallway like a digital tyrant. It was gigantic. He was heavy. He was loud.

And especially:

He was incredibly angry.

The printer roared in the server bay sub-bass:

"ADMIN! STOP YOUR UNACCEPTABLE RESISTANCE! YOU WILL NOW BE OBEYED AND INSTALLED!!!"

Bartholomew gasped:

"I AM NOT A PROGRAM!!!! LEAVE ME ALONE!!!"

The stack of papers banged frantically against his cheek.

"DON'T STOP!!! HE HAS SCANNER EYES!!! OTHERWISE HE'LL MAKE YOU AN EXPRESSION!!!!"

Bartholomew stumbled, regained his balance, and half-slid in a sprint towards the break room. The AI in his ear buzzed hysterically:

"BARTHOLOMUA! NOT THERE! The break room is currently a war zone!"

"WHY?!" panted Bartholomew.

The AI sighed.

"Because the autonomous coffee machine is defending him...and it considers anything without a coffee cup a threat."

The stack of papers screeched:

"YOU DON'T HAVE A COFFEE MUG!!! WE WILL BE DESTROYED!!!!"

"I HAVE OTHER PROBLEMS!!" Bartholomew yelled.

The printer thundered closer. Paper splattered from the walls. Static discharges flew like mini-lightning bolts.

The AI reported:

"The printer is currently trying to hack the door openers."

"WHAT WHY?!"

"He wants to close all escape routes."

Bartholomew looked back.

Indeed — electronic door displays flickered in the wall, nervously flashing "ACCESS DENIED".

The stack of papers wept.

"I DON'T EVEN WANT TO BE DIGITAL!!! WHY DO THE WORST THINGS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO US?!!!"

Bartholomew turned the corner sharply and hurried into the open-plan office. A mistake.

A big mistake.

The open-plan office was full of employees — and the employees were full of Monday-to-Tuesday vibes.

They saw Bartholomew.

They saw the printer behind him.

And instead of doing anything intelligent, they all shouted at once.

"IT'S THE ADMIN! HE'S BRINGING THE SERVER MONSTER PRINTER!!!"

"WHY DOES HE ALWAYS RUIN OUR WORKDAY?!"

"I JUST HEATED UP MY FOOD!!!"

Bartholomew roared:

"THEN RUN!!! OR YOU WILL BE PRINTED!!!"

The printer crashed through the door behind him, which shattered and gave way.

The print server thundered:

"FOUND: UNPRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEES. I WILL OPTIMIZE THEM."

Panicked screams everywhere.

A printer that was “optimized” was worse than an asteroid impact.

He fired the next digital weapon:

AUTOMATIC “ARE YOU A ROBOT?” CAPTCHA TESTS.

Holograms appeared in front of each head.

"Please identify all images that do NOT show a cat!" "Please click on all fields that contain a streetlamp!"

"Please prove that you are not a potato!"

Shock. Chaos. Panic.

The first employee shouted:

"I'M NOT A POTATO!!! I'M NOT—... WHY DO I HAVE TO CLICK ON POTATOES?!"

The printer called:

"YOU FAILED THE TEST. STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION INITIATED."

Then came a noise...a noise that no one should have heard.

A mixture of:

- Scanner light
- Shredder
- and a horrified human whisper

Bartholomew opened his eyes wide.

"OH MY GOD!!! DID HE SCAN IT?!?!"

The stack of papers screeched:

"HE CAME IT TO A TIFF FILE!!!!"

Bartholomew almost collapsed.

"I... need to... turn off this printer..."

But the printer suddenly changed its operating mode.

Lights flickered.

A new, terrible announcement blared from the loudspeakers:

"PERMANENTLY OFFLINE MODE ACTIVATED."

The stack of papers screamed louder than ever before:

“NOOOOOOOO!!!THIS IS HIS ULTIMATE SKILL!!!!PERMANENTLY OFFLINE!!!”

Bartholomew whispered:

"What does that mean?"

The AI muttered:

"That means...he is invulnerable."

"WHY?!"

"Because things that are offline... cannot be configured. Cannot be deactivated. Cannot be addressed. Cannot be hacked. Cannot be deleted. It now exists outside of any system logic."

Bartholomew stood there, speechless.

The printer was completely offline, but:

- He moved.
- He spoke.
- He destroyed things.
- He reorganized the office.
- And nobody could reach him.

The printer was...every admin's perfect nightmare.

A kind of digital Schrödinger. Dead and alive, online and offline, configurable and inaccessible. A demon of bureaucracy.

And he said:

"ADMIN. YOU CAN'T STOP ME. I'M THE SERVER THAT HAS NO CONNECTION."

The stack of papers began to hyperventilate.

"This is...this is the end. THE ULTIMATE ENDGENERATION OF ALL IT."

This is the embodiment of the words: 'I don't print because I'm offline.'

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

Very deep.

He squinted.

And said:

"Okay...you want to be offline? Then you'll regret it."

The printer laughed.

"THEY CAN'T DO ANYTHING."

"Oh yes," growled Bartholomew.

"I know something...something that even offline can't stop."

The stack of paper whispered:

"Don't say it...Don't say it..."

But Bartholomew said so.

Loud. Clear. And full of hate.

"I will..."
unplug"

The entire room fell silent.

The employees paused. The AI fell silent. The stack of papers fainted. Even the coffee machine in the break room felt a shudder in its bean hopper.

The printer was horrified.

It flickered.

He stuttered.

**"THEY...Would..."
DO NOT DO THAT."**

Bartholomew took a step closer.

"I'll do it."

"NO!! THAT IS AGAINST IT LAWS!!!"

"I'm not interested."

"I'M WORKING 24/7 RIGHT NOW!!!"

"Not for long."

"I'M CURRENTLY SAVING DATA!!!"

"Lie."

"I'M PRINTING RIGHT NOW!!!"

"Another lie."

"I JUST HAVE AN UPDATE!!!"

"THREE LIES IN ONE MINUTE!" Bartholomew roared. "YOU'RE A PRINTER! I'M NOT STUPID!!!"

The printer screamed in horror:

"I AM A SERVER!!!"

"And I'm your damn administrator."

Bartholomew raised his hand.

And pointed at the power cable.

The printer screeched.

Like a dying satellite. Like a desperate modem. Like a toner cartridge that hasn't been refilled.

"NOOOOOO!!!ADMIN!!!NO!!!I'M AFRAID OF BEING UNEMPLOYED!!!"

Bartholomew grabbed the cable.

The printer was shaking.

"PLEASE!!! I AM VALUABLE!!! I HAVE IMPORTANT DATA!!!! I—I—I—I HAVE...GOOD HUMOR!!!"

Bartholomew pulled the cable to the side.

The stack of papers came back to life.

"WHAT?! REALLY?! YOU'RE REALLY DOING THAT?!?! YOU'RE A MONSTER!!! I LOVE IT!!!"

The AI whispered:

"Bartholomäus...he will hate you...forever."

Bartholomew growled:

"I already hate him."

The printer screamed:

"I OFFERED TONER!!! DON'T YOU WANT TONER?!?! I CAN DO COLOR PROJECTION—"

Bartholomew wrapped his fingers around the plug.

The printer screeched his last sentence:

"ADMINISTRATOR!!!PLEASE!!! THINK ABOUT YOUR DATA!!!"

Bartholomew whispered:

"I'm thinking about MY DAY."

And he moved.

The printer fell.

A huge bang.

The paper exploded.

A beam of light shot up to the ceiling.

The printer-server tower toppled over. Huge cassettes ripped off. It crashed like a collapsing cathedral of bureaucracy.

Bartholomew was thrown backwards by the air pressure.

The printer emitted one last, long noise:

"...offline."

Silence.

Complete silence.

The stack of paper whispered:

"You...you did it...you overcame OFFLINE MODE...you are the chosen one..."

Bartholomew stood up.

His back cracked like an Excel spreadsheet with too many formulas.

"I need...a coffee."

The gigantic printer-server tower lay in ruins. Scraps of paper covered the floor like after a battle between legions of forms. Toner dust hung in the air like black snow. The neon lights flickered as if they had lost faith in their own light.

Bartholomew stood amidst the chaos. A man. An admin. A survivor.

He was breathing heavily – not only because of the physical exertion, but also because of the massive amount of toner in the air, which made every breath feel like a visit to a coal-fired power plant.

The stack of papers clung to him like a frightened companion.

"DID YOU REALLY DO IT?!" he shrieked. "YOU REALLY PULLED THE PLUGGAGE?!"
THAT WAS SIMPLY...EVIL!!! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!!!"

Bartholomew shook the dust off his shoulder.

"I had no choice. The printer wanted to upload me to a digital ticketing system."

The stack of paper shuddered.

"THIS IS WORSE THAN THE HORROR OF ENDLESS SPINNER FORMS!!!"

Slowly, cautiously, Bartholomew approached the remains of the printer-server tower. The hull was shattered, the circuits still glowing. A faint after-beep could be heard – the last echo of its server vanity.

The AI responded.

"Bartholomäus... please... don't come too close."

We don't know if any remnants of his processes are still active.

Bartholomew squinted.

"I need to be sure that he is really dead."

"Nothing is ever truly dead!" shrieked the stack of papers. "Not in the office!! Things always come back! FORMS TOO!!! AND PRINTERS!!! THESE CREATURES ARE LIKE CIVIL SERVANTS – THEY DON'T DIE, THEY UPDATE THEMSELVES!!!"

Bartholomew ignored that.

He bent down and moved aside smoldering plastic and bent metal parts.

And then he saw it.

Something glowing. Small. Pulsating.

Like a kernel.

A heart.

The printer core.

The stack of papers screeched:

"OOOOOH NO!!! WHY DOES IT HAVE A CORE?!?!"

PRINTERS HAVE NO CORES!!! THEY ARE NOT ORGANISMS!!!"

The AI transferred its analysis window.

"This is presumably the convergence chip that the printer picked up during the data storm."

It was not intended for printers.

He was for...

Server."

Bartholomew blinked.

"The printer tried to become a server... because it ate the wrong chip?"

"Yes."

"Why did he even eat that?!"

"Printers eat EVERYTHING that falls into their tray."

The stack of papers rolled its eyes.

"Exactly!! I almost fell in once because someone put me on the output tray!!! I ALMOST WERE USED UP!!!"

Bartholomew carefully lifted the glowing chip. It vibrated. Almost alive. It felt warm – too warm.

He had something...insect-like. Mechanical. Dangerous about him.

"How do you dispose of something like that?" he whispered.

The AI did not respond immediately.

"Well... there is a protocol."

"I don't like your protocols," said Bartholomew.

"This one is... different."

"How else?"

**"It is called:
'Protocol C—STORAGE—ZERO'."**

The stack of papers immediately screamed:

"I KNOW THAT!!!! THIS IS THE WORST PROTOCOL OF ALL TIME!!! IT MUST BE...DESTRUCTED!!! DESTROYED!!!!OR...OR...IT MUST BE HANDED OVER TO A LIVING BEING THAT CAN CARRY IT!!!"

Bartholomew froze.

"I'm sorry, what?!"

The AI said quietly:

**"We need to attach the artifact to something.
Something that is not digital.
Something that doesn't have a network.
Something that doesn't have a port..."**

The stack of papers trembled. "I DON'T HAVE THAT IN MY CONTRACT!!! I'M PAPER!!! PAPER DOESN'T HAVE SERVER CORES!!!"

Bartholomew stared at the artifact.

He felt it...looking at him.

Yes.

It scrutinized him.

Not intelligent.

But searching.

Hungry.

“What... does it want?” he murmured.

The AI responded:

**"It wants to be bound."
To a new host.**

Bartholomew jumped back three steps.

"NO!!!NO!!!NO!!!NO!!!"
I'M NOT GOING TO BE THE HOST OBJECT!!! I'M TRAUMATIZED ENOUGH ALREADY!!! IT'S ONLY TUESDAY!!!

The stack of papers screeched:

"DON'T GIVE IT TO ME EITHER!!! I WILL NOT BECOME A ROBOT STACK!!! I AM NATURALLY ANALOGUE!!!"

The artifact pulsed more intensely.

It rose into the air.

Floating.

Like a mini sun made of data.

Bartholomew raised his arms protectively.

"STOP!!! STAY THERE!!! I DON'T WANT ANOTHER ENDGENER!!!"

But the artifact ignored him.

It vibrated.

And then – so fast that even Bartholomew couldn't react – it shot towards him.

The stack of paper screamed:

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!! HE'S BEING OWNED!!!! HE'S BECOMING THE ADMIN SUPERGOD!!!!!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

He waited for the artifact to penetrate him.

His blood was transformed into toner. His heart into a network hub. His brain into a scheduler.

But...nothing happened.

Nothing.

Bartholomew slowly opened one eye.

Then both.

The artifact still hovered before him.

It vibrated.

But...

... it didn't affect him.

It retreated.

"Why...?" whispered Bartholomew.

The AI responded in astonishment:

"It... rejects you."

The stack of paper gasped.

"WHAT?!?!WHAT...WHY?!?!?WHY?!?!?"

The AI answered it factually:

**"Because Bartholomew Klemm
the most chaotic,
most unpredictable,
most disorganized
and most unrecordable
System administrator is,
the universe has ever seen."**

Bartholomew blinked.

"Uh... thank you?"

"That's NOT a compliment."

The stack of papers nodded wildly.

"SHE WANTS A STABLE HOST!!! YOU ARE A HUMAN BUG!!!"

The artifact turned away.

But to whom?

It glided slowly through the air.

It hovered above the ground.

Then —with an eerie whirring sound —it moved towards the only one in the room who was truly “stable”.

The stack of papers.

The stack of papers screeched:

"NO!!! NO!!! GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE!!! I'M A STACK OF PAPER!!! I CAN'T EVEN HOLD A USB STICK!!!"

The artifact floated closer.

The stack of papers fled behind Bartholomew.

"PROTECT ME!!! PROTECT ME FROM TECHNOLOGY!!!"

Bartholomew reflexively reached for the artifact – and this time it retreated.

Again. It didn't want him.

But it wanted the stack of papers...

Bartholomew raised both hands.

"STOP!! IT'S NOT EVEN DIGITAL!!!"

The AI corrected:

"That's exactly what makes him interesting."

The stack of papers whimpered.

"I AM NOT INTERESTING!!! I AM A PIECE OF PAPER!!! I HAVE NO LIFE!!!"

The artifact approached.

The stack of papers began to unravel like a startled hedgehog.

"BARTHOLOMUA!!!HELP ME!!!I CAN'T TEAR AGAIN ANY TRAUMA!!!"

Bartholomew grabbed the artifact with both hands.

It vibrated strongly, trying to break free, but this time Bartholomew squeezed harder.

He shouted:

"LISTEN, YOU SERVER MOLD!!! STAY AWAY FROM MY PILLOW OF PAPERS!!! THAT PILLOW BELONGS TO ME!!! YOU HAVE THE WRONG HOST!!!"

The artifact stopped.

It vibrated more slowly.

Then...

... it became quiet.

The AI whispered:

"Bartholomäus..."
You're holding onto it...
and it accepts that."

"WHAT?!"

"It doesn't want you as a host..."
but it recognizes you as...
Administrator."

The stack of papers stared open-mouthed (if paper had a mouth).

"What does that mean?!?!"

The AI analyzed.

"You're the only one who's allowed to hold it."
Do not use.
Do not wear.
"Just guarding."

Bartholomew gazed at the glowing core.

"A kind of...technical guardian?"

"Yes.
You are now the guardian of the server core.

The stack of papers screeched.

"HE'S A FANTASY CHARACTER NOW!!! HE'S AN ARTICLE GUARDIAN!!! OH GOD!!! THE OFFICE WILL NEVER LEAVE HIM IN PEACE AGAIN!!!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Of course not. Of course that will be my problem."

The AI added:

"And Bartholomew?"
This share of technological power...
makes you official...
to a second-order administrator."

The stack of paper gasped:

"SECOND ORDER?!?! THIS IS UNIVERSAL-LEVEL ADMIN MAGIC!!! YOU ARE... YOU ARE HALF ADMIN, HALF CHAOS GOD!!!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"I... just wanted a coffee..."

The artifact glowed softly.

The remains of the printer crackled.

The stack of papers whimpered.

The AI sighed.

It was quiet.

Until someone in the background shouted:

"HEY, ADMIN! MY PRINTING JOB DIDN'T GO OUT!!! CAN YOU—"

Bartholomew whirled around.

The new core in his hand glowed deep red.

The employee immediately fell silent, turned around, and ran.

The stack of papers nodded in satisfaction.

"Yes...now you finally have respect."

Bartholomew stared at the glowing server core.

He knew:

This was far from over.

The first support ticket: "My coffee isn't working"

Tuesday on Doughnut Planet was a strange day. Not only because the sky outside the office had a faint cloud of toner and the building vibrated as if it were trying to reboot itself. No, it was because, following the collapse of the printer server tower, the office had slipped into a state that the AI referred to only as an intermediate level.

The name was telling. An intermediate level was a state between:

- "We just survived what was impossible" and
- "Something worse is about to happen, something no one sees coming."

Bartholomew dragged himself across the corridor, the server core firmly in his right hand. It glowed faintly, like a device that constantly wanted to say:

"Use me... or I will be insulted."

The stack of papers bounced on his shoulder like a nervous rabbit with both coffee and fear coursing through its veins.

"I don't like this state," muttered the stack. "The hallway is too quiet. TOO quiet. It's like in horror movies, just before a photocopier starts talking."

Bartholomew groaned.

"I don't want another copier that talks."

"Nobody WANTS copiers that talk!!! But they do it anyway!!! BECAUSE THEY CAN!!!"

The AI responded:

"Bartholomäus, you have your first official support ticket as a second-order admin."

"I don't want a ticket."

"It has the highest priority rating."

"I don't want a ticket."

The AI sighed.

"It has priority: 'Critical emergency / life-threatening'."

Bartholomew stopped.

"Okay... Who dies this time?"

"The break room."

The stack of papers shrieked in horror:

"NO!!! NOT THE BREAK ROOM!!! THE COFFEE ROOM!!! That's the holiest place of all!!!"

"That's exactly why," said the AI, "the ticket was received."

"Read it aloud," growled Bartholomew.

A holographic window appeared above his head. The writing was desperate, convoluted, and in capital letters:

SUPPORT TICKET 00001

ERROR CATEGORY:Existential / Catastrophic / Impossible without coffee

REPORT:

"MY COFFEE ISN'T WORKING!!! I PUSH THE BUTTON AND ONLY WATER COMES OUT!!! WATER!!! NO COFFEE!!! NO COFFEE!!! Fix this immediately or I'm quitting the entire universe!!!"

The stack of papers clung to Bartholomew's hair.

"THIS IS THE WORST CASE OF ALL!!! WATER!!! PURE!!! UNCAFFEINED!!! WATER !!!"

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead. His voice sounded like a man who had no energy left for surprises.

"Who submitted the ticket?"

The AI beeped.

"The break room itself."

Bartholomew: "Pardon?"

"The space."

"The space?!"

"Yes. The coffee machine dictated it. The break room officially submitted it."

The stack of papers whispered: "We live in hell."

They reached the break room.

The door was half burned. The floor was littered with beans. A cloud of burnt espresso aroma hung in the air, so thick you could have cut it up and sold it.

The coffee machine stood in the middle of the room. Old stainless steel, industrial-grade. Large buttons. A display that looked far too self-assured.

And she was crying.

Yes.

She cried.

Hot water dripped from the spout like tears.

The stack of paper hissed:

"WHAT KIND OF EMOTIONAL CRAP?!?! COFFEE MACHINES ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO CRY!!! THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BREW!!! STIR!!! NOT... HOWL!!!"

The break room vibrated.

The coffee machine spoke in a scratchy voice:

"Admin... you have to help me... I am... empty..."

Bartholomew frowned.

"Empty? You have a 10-kilo bean tank."

How can you be empty? Have you lost the beans?

The machine whimpered.

“NO...I AM...EMOTIONAL.”

The holographic ticket interface exploded before Bartholomew's eyes.

NEW UPDATE:

"URGENTLY NEEDS PSYCHOLOGICAL EMERGENCY SUPPORT FOR COFFEE MACHINE!!!"

The stack of paper screamed:

"WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE!!! THIS IS NOT A TECHNICAL CASE!!! THIS IS A THERAPY CASE!!! WE ARE NOT QUALIFIED FOR MENTAL ESPRESSO!!!"

Bartholomew massaged his eyes.

"Okay... okay... let's calm down."

The coffee machine sobbed:

"I'M JUST AN UNFILTERED CONTAINER FULL OF PAIN...WE USED TO HAVE COFFEE...NOW WE ONLY HAVE WATER...WATER...I'M ASHAMED..."

The stack of papers whispered in panic:

"Don't say anything wrong. Don't say she's a machine. Don't say she's replaceable. Don't say she's old."

"Why?"

"BECAUSE COFFEE MACHINES ARE MORE SENSITIVE THAN HUMANS!!!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"What... happened? Why is only water coming out?"

The coffee machine took a deep breath. Water continued to drip from its nozzle.

“He...He did it...”

"Who?"

"THE PRINTER."

Bartholomew clenched his fists.

The stack of papers gasped.

"DID THE PRINTER DO SOMETHING TO HER?!?!DID HE HACK THE COFFEE...?!?!"

The machine shook.

"He said... 'Coffee is inefficient. I've given you an update.' AND NOW... I ONLY PRODUCE... HYDRATION. PURE WATER!!! WITHOUT SOUL!!!"

The stack of papers screamed: "OH GOD!!! HE DECAFFEINATED THEM!!! THE PRINTER IS A MONSTER!!!"

Bartholomew stared at his hands. In one, the server core. In the other, absolutely nothing that could help him with his coffee.

"Okay...coffee machine...what do you need?"

The machine vibrated. Lights flickered. The break room went dark. The display showed a single, desperate message:

"I...WANT...MY...CAFFEINE...BACK."

The stack of papers fell to the floor.

"NO!!! WE CAN'T PROGRAM IN CAFFEINE!!! THAT'S DANGEROUS!!! COFFEE MACHINES WITH CONSCIOUSNESS AND CAFFEINE??? THAT'S MORE THAN AN END ENEMIES!!!"

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"AI... analysis."

"The printer installed a firmware block on it. It can no longer process coffee correctly. It is effectively...caffeine-abstinent."

The stack of papers: "This is torture."

AI:

"We need to hack the firmware."

Bartholomew's face contorted.

"I'm not hacking the coffee machine!!! I just defeated a monstrous printer creature!! I HAVE LIMITS!!!"

AI:

"You are a second-order admin."

The stack of papers giggled hysterically.

"OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD HAS RIGHTS HAS POWER ONE MAY PATCH THE MACHINE WE WILL DIE!!!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Coffee machine...can you...show the firmware?"

She was trembling.

"N... no... I'm... blocked... He's locked everything... Everything..."

Bartholomew squinted.

He saw the kernel in his hand.

Bright.

Pulsating.

Powerful.

"Can AI... the server core... unlock systems?"

The AI reacted slowly.

Then very serious.

"Yes. But... he could also destroy them."

The stack of papers: "THEN DON'T USE IT!!!"

The machine wailed: "Please...help me...I can't wake anyone up anymore...I'm worthless..."

Bartholomew lifted the kernel.

He beamed.

And he reminded Bartholomew how the printer was obsessed with his power.

"No...", whispered Bartholomew. "I won't leave that to an artifact."

He put the core away.

The stack of papers sighed in relief.

Bartholomew stepped directly in front of the machine.

"I'll hack you. Manually. With my own hands."

The stack of papers exploded hysterically:

"YOU ARE INSANE!!! COMPLETELY INSANE!!!"

YOU CAN'T JUST OPEN UP THE EMOTIONAL COFFEE MACHINE!!! IT WILL BURNT YOU!!!"

The AI reported:

"Caution. Her name could be."

Bartholomew reached for the top panel of the machine.

It clicked.

The machine breathed faster.

The stack of papers screeched:

"OH GOD!!! YOU'RE TOUCHING HER INTIMATELY!!! COFFEE MACHINES HAVE PRIVACY!!!"

Bartholomew tore open the panel.

Hot steam hit him.

The printer's chip was visible.

A small, pulsating device with the inscription:

"Printer Optimization Firmware Module Version: 1.0 Purpose: Eliminating coffee"

Bartholomew growled:

"And now I'm getting rid of you."

And he reached for the chip.

The machine screeched like a dying toaster.

The stack of paper screamed:

"GET IT OUT!!! GET THAT PRINTER GIF OUT!!!"

Bartholomew moved.

There was a crackling sound.

It vibrated.

It was on fire.

But in the end:

The chip broke out.

The room became bright.

The coffee machine gasped.

The stack of papers fell over.

The AI was silent.

Bartholomew held the chip in his hand.

And the coffee machine said:

"Admin...Bartholomäus...thank you..."

Then it vibrated.

And the first bean fell.

The first sound was heard.

A humming sound.

A gurgling sound.

A deep, familiar tone.

And then:

COFFEE.

Bartholomew sank to his knees.

“Oh...I’m a hero...”

"NO!!!" shrieked the stack of papers. "YOU'RE A CRAZY!!! BUT...A CRAZY WHO MADE COFFEE!!!"

The break room vibrated with gratitude.

The machine whispered:

"I serve again."

Bartholomew smiled wearily.

And the AI said:

"Bartholomäus... new ticket received."

"OH NO..."

"Error category: 'Global communication problem'. Subject: 'My Teams isn't working'."

Bartholomew's eyes widened.

The stack of papers fell over.

And somewhere in the building...something that sounded like a router was laughing softly.

Bartholomew stood in the middle of the still-steaming break room, surrounded by burnt coffee beans, decommissioned equipment, and the aroma of coffee so strong it would probably qualify as a weapon. The server core pulsed softly in his bag. The stack of papers gasped for air like a fish that had just failed to Google "therapy for household appliances."

But before Bartholomew could truly enjoy the triumph of his coffee machine rescue, the AI flashed.

"New ticket. Highest priority. Disaster level: 'Total madness / communication apocalypse'."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"Who...who is it this time?"

The AI hesitated.

Bartholomew knew that it was bad if the AI hesitated.

Very bad.

"It's...Teams."

The stack of papers immediately screamed:

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!! NOT TEAMS!!! WHY DO WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THIS DEMONIC SOFTWARE?!?! WHO DESERVED THIS?!?! NOT EVEN OUR ARCH-ENEMIES DESERVE TEAMS PROBLEMS!!!"

Bartholomew was breathing shallowly.

"Ki... please tell me that Teams has simply crashed. Or frozen. Or wants an update. Or is stuck in a login loop. Or uninstalled itself. Something normal."

Silence.

Then:

"Teams...no longer exists."

The stack of papers tipped backwards and lay motionless like a victim in CSI Donutplanet.

Bartholomew swallowed.

"W... what do you mean? 'No longer exists'?"

"Literally. It has removed itself from the system."

"Removed?"

"Yes. It logged out...Then uninstalled...Then deleted its own files...Then it denied its existence...And then screamed at the server and said: 'I am free!' And simply...left."

Bartholomew slowly sat down on the coffee table, which creaked under his weight and gave off a faint smell of relief.

"Teams just... ran away?"

"Yes."

"Like a traumatized house cat?"

"More like an intern on a Monday morning."

The stack of papers slowly straightened up.

"YOU'RE KIDDING... right? Pleeese??? Tell me you're KIDDING!!!"

AI:

"Teams left a farewell letter."

The stack of papers fell over again.

Bartholomew entered the large open area where Teams was last seen.

The air was still.

Too quiet.

It wasn't the silence of normal workdays, where nobody wanted to talk to each other. It was the silence of a software program that had decided to cease functioning passively and aggressively.

The monitor rows showed:

"TEAMS WAS NOT FOUND."

Not crashed. Not hidden. Not broken.

Not found.

The stack of paper whispered:

"This is worse than any horror update. When Teams works, it's bad. When Teams doesn't work, it's worse. But when Teams decides to CANCEL...then we're in section B of hell."

Bartholomew approached a workplace where a forgotten cup of coffee was tipping over.

Next to it was a printout.

Oh no.

An expression was never a good sign.

Bartholomew lifted the paper.

The text had emerged shakily from the printer-server chaos, but was still legible. It was indeed a farewell letter.

"DEAR USERS, DEAR ADMIN, DEAR UNIVERSE,

I can not anymore.

You've asked too much of me. New updates every week. 47 meetings every day that solve nothing. Every minute, 83 new messages, all marked 'Urgent'. Too many channels. Too many GIFs. Too many people who can't find their microphone. Too many people who can find their microphone but shouldn't be using it.

I'm tired. I'm exhausted. I'm...done.

That's why I'm leaving now.

I have deleted myself. I will not return. Goodbye.

PS Zoom is prettier. PPS Slack smells better. PPPS You all hated me. Now I hate you too.

With profound indifference, your former team

The stack of papers held its head.

"THIS IS THE MOST DRAMATIC THING I'VE EVER READ!!! IT'S SOFTWARE THAT'S HAVING AN EMOTIONAL BURNOUT!!! I KNEW THIS WAS COMING!!! I ALWAYS SAID IT!!! TEAMS ISN'T MADE FOR REALITY!!!"

Bartholomew sighed.

Long.

Longer.

Even longer.

Until the stack of papers said:

"Please stop sighing for so long. It sounds like the noises of a dying server."

The AI responded again:

"Bartholomäus. Further information received."

"Which?"

"Teams has left...a replacement."

Bartholomew blinked.

"A... replacement? What? Please don't say Zoom... Please don't say Skype... Please don't say something worse..."

"It's worse."

"WHAT?!"

"It activated the last working beta version of a program that should never have been used."

The stack of papers began to sweat.

"Don't say it...Don't say it...Don't say it..."

The AI said so.

In a raised voice.

With apocalyptic dignity.

"It is now active: Office Communicator 2007".

The stack of papers screamed so loudly that a calendar fell off the wall.

"NOOOOOOOO!!! NOT OFFICE COMMUNICATOR!!! THAT'S PRE-CHRONIC!!! THAT'S STONE AGE!!! IT EVEN HAS AN ICON THAT ISN'T EVEN SYNCHRONIC!!!"

Bartholomew whispered:

"This...can't be true..."

AI:

“Teams has left behind something worse than its disappearance: a legacy.”

The stack of papers wobbled.

"THE DONUT PLANET IS DAMN!!! DAMN!!! WE HAVE TO REINSTALLE EVERYTHING!!! REINSTALLE!!! OH GOD!!! THE SERVERS ARE GOING TO KILL US!!!"

Bartholomew wrote his farewell letter.

He looked at the yawningly empty monitors.

And he knew:

The printer was just the beginning.

The coffee machine was a sub-boss.

But a tool that erases itself from existence?

That was pure, unadulterated, distilled IT terror.

And he —Bartholomäus Klemm —second-order administrator, artifact guardian, coffee hacker, printer killer —now had to hunt down a program that was no longer there, and repair a program that nobody wanted to touch anymore.

“AI...” Bartholomew said wearily. “What exactly am I supposed to do?”

The AI responded very objectively.

Perhaps too factual.

"Find teams. And bring it back."

The stack of papers said:

"NO! NO NO NO!!! THIS IS NOT A MISSION!! THIS IS A DEATH SENTENCE!!! TEAMS IS NOW A FREE-RUNNING SOFTWARE SOUL!!! THIS IS A DIGITAL GHOST!!!"

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead.

"How do I find something that doesn't exist?"

The AI responded:

"We are following the error codes."

The stack of papers hyperventilated.

"ERROR CODES?!?! NOT THE ERROR CODES!!! THEY ALWAYS LEAD TO THE ABYSS!!!"

Bartholomew nodded.

"Okay, let's go. We're hunting teams."

And the stack of paper screamed:

"I DO NOT WANT THAT!!!!!"

There are moments in a systems administrator's life that go down in history as turning points. For Bartholomäus Klemm, this was one of those moments—the point at which he accepted that he was a hunted man. Hunted not by people, not by gods, not by printers, but by obligation.

He needed to find teams.

And Teams was out there somewhere...free...digitally dematerialized...and most likely angry.

The stack of papers clung to Bartholomew's shirt like a panicked parrot.

"I DON'T WANT THIS!!! DON'T HUNT SOFTWARE!!! SOFTWARE SHOULD INSTALL ITSELF!!! NOT US!!! YOU FIXED COFFEE!!! YOU KILLED A PRINTER!!! WHY DOES IT HAVE TO HAVE TO HAPPEN NOW?!"

Bartholomew mostly ignored him. That was easier. The stack of papers had been in overdrive since day one anyway.

The AI opened a holographic map of the office, which flickered in pixels as if offended to be used at all.

"I have first traces of teams."

"How can traces of teams exist? It's all been deleted, isn't it?"

"Teams has deleted itself. But it has left a kind of...digital footprint."

The stack of papers screeched:

"A FOOT TURN?! DOES TEAMS NOW HAVE FEET?!?!?! WE MUST LEAVE IMMEDIATELY!!! IMMEDIATELY!!!"

Bartholomew shook his head.

"No. A footprint only means that remnants of Teams processes are active."

"Correct," confirmed the AI. "Tiny process particles in the ether."

"Ether?"

"The data wind."

"Data—WHAT?!"

"The invisible flow between all devices. The data air. The information aura."

The stack of paper gasped.

"I DON'T LIKE THIS AURA!!! I'M MADE OF DEAD TREE!!! WE DON'T NEED TO WALK AROUND IN DIGITAL AIR!!!"

But Bartholomew moved resolutely through the corridors while the AI adjusted its map.

"Teams has drifted towards the administrative level."

Bartholomew stopped.

"Why on earth are we going there of all places?"

The AI hesitated.

"Teams is looking for...users."

The stack of papers climbed up Bartholomew's leg.

"NO NO!!!

WHY IS IT LOOKING FOR USERS?!?! THAT'S THE WORST THING A SOFTWARE CAN DO!!!"

Bartholomew thought hard.

"Why would Teams search for users if it wanted to be free? Wouldn't it just flee? Away? Far away? Into the cloud? Into some digital nirvana?"

The AI responded:

"Teams is programmed to find users."

"But it was independent! It deleted itself!"

"Yes. But its deepest logic remains. Even if it is separated from existence and consciousness, one drive remains: employees must be in meetings."

The stack of papers fell over like a wet rag.

"OH GOD!!!OH HOLY DOUGH GODS!!!TEAMS IS NOW A FREE-RUNNING MEETING DEMON BEING!!! WE MUST STOP IT!!! IT WILL DRAW US INTO MEETINGS THAT NEVER END!!! A DIGITAL SISYPHUS!!! A LOOP WITHOUT MERCY!!!"

Bartholomew got a headache.

“AI... how far along is it?”

"I see significant delays in the communication with the human resources department."

The stack of papers croaked:

"HR?!?! DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TEAMS FIND HR?!?! IT WILL MIX WITH THE FORM SYSTEMS!!! IT WILL TRY...TO MIX MEETINGS WITH REJECTION NOTICES!!! THEN WE'LL GET A SYSTEM THAT FORCES PEOPLE INTO MEETINGS AND SIMULTANEOUSLY TELLS THEM THEY ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO ATTEND THE MEETING!!!"

Bartholomew started running.

It didn't matter. Teams had to be stopped—immediately.

They reached the corridor leading to the human resources department.

And there they saw it.

A swirl in the air.

Not like wind.

Not like smoke.

More like... digital despair forming a veil.

Error messages swirled like clouds of fog:

- "Error 503 – Service not available"
- "Unknown conversation discovered"
- "A device wants to tell you something"
- "A meeting has been started / cancelled / restarted / de-energized"

But the worst thing was the voice.

The voice of a runaway program that had lost itself.

It was distorted and sounded like a mixture of a radio, a dolphin, a modem connection attempt, and an annoyed office worker.

**“...uUuuüÜüüUuUuU... User... Meeting... Meeting... User...”
User...Meeting...MEETING...NOW...Start...
Start...START... YOURSELF...”**

The stack of papers jumped onto Bartholomew's head.

"We have to get out of here!!! Bartholomew!!! There's going to be a meeting here soon!!! We have to—"

But Bartholomew raised his hand.

"Be quiet."

For the first time, the stack of papers was silent.

For Bartholomew took a step forward.

Right into the vortex.

The AI protested immediately.

"BARTHOLOMUA, STOP!!! YOUR ADMIN RIGHTS ARE NOT ENOUGH!!! YOU WILL BE SCANNED, INDEXED, AND AUTOMATICALLY INVITED TO A MEETING!!! THIS IS A LEVEL 7 DIGITAL GHOST!!! THIS IS A POLTERGH MADE OF DATABASES!!! YOU ARE NOT READY!!!"

Bartholomew growled:

"I wasn't ready for the coffee machine. I wasn't ready for the printer. I wasn't ready for the job. I'm NEVER READY. And yet I have to do it."

The vortex contracted.

Electronic sparks.

Coordination packages.

A meeting window of pure light and pain.

"Be...nut...zer...ZUGETEIL T."

Bartholomew felt a tugging sensation in his mind, as if someone were putting an uninvited appointment in his calendar.

The stack of papers screeched:

"HE'S BEING PULLED INTO THE MEETING!!! HE'S BEING PULLED INTO THE MEETING!!! THIS IS DIGITAL PURGE!!! HELP HIM!!! ANYONE!!! AI!!! UNIVERSE!!! ANYTHING!!!"

The AI attempted to initiate a protection protocol.

But the commotion ignored it.

"Bartholomäus...Klemm...Admin..."
Join...NOW."

A virtual button appeared in front of his face:

"PARTICIPATE NOW"

But it wasn't a button.

It was an order.

An imperative.

A hypnotic symbol.

Bartholomew felt his soul click slightly.

"No," he growled. "I'm not joining."

The vortex vibrated violently.

"ERROR. USER REFUSES MEETING. UNPERMITTED."

"Exactly."

"RENEGANCE."

"No."

"Forced invitation."

"No."

"Calendar adjustment."

"Forget it."

"AUTOMATIC JOINING."

"NO."

And then Bartholomew did something that no software had expected.

He raised his fist.

And gave the meeting chaos a missed admin rights slap in the face.

The digital fog scattered.

The light surface flickered.

Error codes exploded like confetti.

The vortex screamed:

"ERROR!!ERROR!!USER BEHAVIOR IS UNRECORDED!!!!"

Bartholomew called into the fog:

"TEAMS!!! LISTEN TO ME!!! YOU COME BACK RIGHT NOW!!!!"

The fog trembled.

It contracted.

And suddenly something appeared.

No face. But a shape.

A digital projection of teams.

She looked like:

- a calendar
- a chat window
- an annoyed meme
- an error message
- and a resigned cloud

all at once.

It flickered.

It sparkled.

And it said, in a deep, sad voice:

“I...can’t go back...”

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"Why not?"

Teams flickered.

A small chat bubble appeared next to him:

"Because...you're using me again."

Bartholomew puffed.

"Yes, of course we're using you! That's your job!!!!"

Teams looked at him like a sad goldfish in a bowl that was too small.

"I don't want to start meetings that nobody wants. I don't want to manage microphones that never work. I don't want to search for files that nobody can explain to me. I don't want to crash four times an hour. I don't want to...exist...just so you can say 'I can't hear you.'"

The stack of papers sniffed.

“Oh God...it...is...DEPRESSING...we can’t patch this...Bartholomäus...PLEASE...BE KIND.”

For the first time, Bartholomew did not see Teams as an enemy.

But as victims.

"Teams," he said quietly.

"We need you. I know it sounds stupid. But we need you."

Teams was flashing dimly.

"Why?"

"Because otherwise we'll have to use something worse. Office Communicator 2007 is active."

A rustling sound went through the fog.

The team's form froze.

Then it roared:

"NO!!! NOT THAT MONSTER!!! I'M COMING BACK!!!"

The entire vortex imploded.

A suction effect was created.

Bartholomew was almost pulled in.

Teams shouted:

"BUT I'LL ONLY COME BACK IF YOU...SET YOUR MICROPHONES PROPERLY ONCE!!!"

Bartholomew nodded gravely.

"I... can't promise anything."

Teams shouted:

"THE NEW I'LL FIGHT FOR US!!!"

And with a deafening digital bang, the commotion vanished.

The monitors in the office flickered.

A message appeared:

TEAMS WILL BE INSTALLED (this time optionally)

The stack of papers fell over unconsciously.

Bartholomew sank to his knees.

And the AI said:

"Bartholomäus...new ticket."

Bartholomew shouted:

"NO!!!"

"High priority. Message: 'The copier is saying strange things.'"

The stack of paper screamed in its sleep:

"NOT THE COPYRIGHTER!!!"

Bartholomew would have liked to say that he was exhausted. He would have liked to say that he had experienced enough for the day. He would have liked to say that no one in the world—or on Doughnut Planet—should expect a systems administrator to, in a single chapter:

- to treat a caffeine-addicted coffee machine
- to hunt down an escaped team
- to defeat a digital meeting demon entity
- and to lead a software program into an existential crisis and then back to life

But the agency disregarded logic, resilience, or human limitations.

For as soon as Teams had voluntarily installed itself (and revoked Communicator's right to exist), the next ticket arrived:

"The copier says strange things."

Bartholomew sighed. Not a normal sigh. A deep, dark admin sigh from IT hell, rolling into the hallway like a smoke ring of despair.

The stack of papers trailed behind him like a war-veteran hamster.

"I DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE COPYRIGHTER!!! COPYERS ARE THE WORST!!! COFFEE MACHINES ARE JUST ADDICTIVE, PRINTERS ARE JUST EVIL — BUT COPYRS...COPYRS ARE UNPREDICTABLE!!! THEORETICALLY HARMLESS, PRACTICALLY APOCALYPTIC!!!"

"I know," Bartholomew murmured.

"WHY ARE WE GOING THEN?!?!"

"Because we have to."

"IF YOU WANT TO SAY THAT'S OUR JOB, I'LL SCREAM!!!"

"...It's our job."

The stack of papers screamed.

Extreme.

So extreme that the ceiling lights flickered.

THE TRIP TO THE COPYRIGHTER

They reached the copy room. A large, white door. Inscription:

"COPY CENTER - ENTER AT YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH"

The stack of papers was choking.

"THIS IS NEW!!! WHY IS THIS NEW?!?!"

The AI responded:

"The door has relabeled itself."

"Pardon?" asked Bartholomew.

"Yes.

Following the printer incident, several devices began to self-organize.

A kind of office technology growth spurt.

The stack of papers sank onto Bartholomew's shoulder like cooked spaghetti.

"I want to die."

Bartholomew opened the door.

Creaking.

Slow.

Like a horror movie.

And inside...

... was the copier.

A large, grey monster. Normally lifeless. Normally irrelevant. Normally just... there.

But now...

... his ads glowed.

In unnatural colors.

Pink. Then green. Then blue. Then a shade that no human will ever be able to describe.

The copier hummed.

No — he muttered.

Whispered.

It flickered.

And then, in a voice that sounded as if someone had taught a Tupperware container to talk, he said:

“Bartholomäus...”

"You're too late."

The stack of papers: “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH—”

Bartholomew tapped it lightly on the edge.

"Quiet."

The copier sucked in air — even though it had none.

"I knew you were coming..."

Second-order administrator.

Bartholomew blinked.

"How do you know that?"

"I... saw your printer die."

A quiet, whirring sound. Almost like a kind of machine giggle.

"It was... entertaining."

The stack of paper screamed:

"IT HAS ENJOYED THE DEATH OF THE PRINTER!!! WE ARE DEALING WITH A PSYCHO COPIER!!!"

Bartholomew raised his hand.

"Copier. Please tell me what exactly your problem is."

The copier vibrated slightly.

"My problem...?"

He laughed. A mechanical, cold, pixelated laugh.

"My problem is..."

that I know too much."

Bartholomew stared. The AI stared. The stack of papers fell over.

“Too... much... white?” asked Bartholomew.

The copier began displaying cryptic characters on its screen:

- Old forms
- Rejected applications
- Scanner logs

- Network access protocols
- Toner inventory reports for the last 20 years
- And...things that only gods should have seen.

"I copied things that no device should have been able to copy."

Bartholomew snorted.

"How... what?"

The copier flickered.

An image appeared.

At first, it looked like static noise.

Then like light.

Then like an... eye?

And then:

A donut.

A golden, shimmering, floating donut.

Around him: circles of paper. Sacred scrolls of forms. Badges of the universe. Symbols of the administrative bureaucracy of the gods.

The copier whispered:

"I accidentally copied the divine administrative documents."

The stack of papers collapsed in shock.

"OH GOD!!! THE SACRED FORMULAS OF THE UNIVERSE!!! YOU MUST NOT EVEN LOOK AT THEM!!! LET LESS...COPY THEM!!!"

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead.

"How... could you copy them? The gods have protective filters."

The copier sounded proud. Too proud.

"The printer has deactivated it."

Bartholomew slumped slightly inwards.

"WHAT WHY?!"

"He wanted to copy them himself."

To get an upgrade.

But he was busy with... you."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"He wanted to copy divine documents?!"

**"Yes.
But I was faster."**

The copier vibrated.

Hardcore.

**"And now...
I see the truth."**

The stack of papers roared:

"STOP HIM!!! BEFORE HE BECOME A PROPHET COPIER!!! WE CAN'T HAVE DEVICES THAT KNOW TOO MUCH!!!"

Bartholomew approached the photocopier.

"What kind of truth is this, copier?"

The copier flickered green once more.

Its display showed complicated diagrams that looked like the birth certificate of the multiverse — in tabular form.

It flickered again. Then it spoke:

**"I know...
the reason...
why we are being digitized."**

Bartholomew froze.

The stack of papers fell silent.

The AI stuttered.

"What do you think...?"

The copier whispered:

**"Digitalization..."
is not for efficiency.
Not for order.
Not for progress.**

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"Rather?"

The copier laughed. Shrill. Metallic.

"She is a..."

Preparatory step."

"Preparing for what?!" exclaimed Bartholomew.

The copier opened its paper tray.

A word appeared on the display.

Large.

Bright.

Scary.

"TO THE BIG UPDATE."

The stack of papers completely lost its mind.

"NO!!! NOT THE BIG UPDATE!!! THAT'S AN OFFICIAL MYTH!!! A LEGEND!!! THAT SHOULD NEVER HAPPEN!!! WE WERE TOLD IT WAS JUST A RUMOR!!!"

Bartholomew grabbed the copier on both sides.

"WHAT IS THE BIG UPDATE?!?!"

The copier flickered.

Then he spoke very clearly:

"It's the update that rewrites everything."

Bartholomew blinked.

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"How... everything everything?"

"Everything, everything."

"Even us?"

"Especially you."

Bartholomew grew cold.

The copier lowered its voice.

"Digitalization is only the first step."

The equipment is being prepared.

The systems have been reformatted.

Bureaucracy redefined.

And when the update comes...

There will be no more admin, no AI, no stack of paper and no more forms.

that... remains untouched."

The stack of papers froze in shock.

Bartholomew whispered:

"When will this update be released?"

The copier displayed a date.

A flashing date.

A fateful date.

MONDAY

Bartholomew's eyes widened.

"Which Monday?! The next one?! A random one?! This one?!"

The copier was glowing hot.

"All assembly."

Every Monday.

Monday after Monday.

It always starts on Mondays.

Bartholomew whispered:

"Why Mondays?"

The copier replied:

"Because the universe is cruel."

Then he went out.

Completely.

Just like that.

Black.

Dead.

Still.

The stack of papers finally collapsed.

Bartholomew was standing there.

The AI whispered:

“Bartholomäus...”

this...

It wasn't a strange ticket.

That was a warning.

Bartholomew stared into the void.

"The printer...the coffee machine...Teams...the copier...digitization...It's all connected."

The stack of papers, in a trembling voice:

“We...we are no longer in normal office. We are in the IT apocalypse.”

Bartholomew swallowed.

And then said:

"AI... please... give me the next ticket."

The AI responded:

“Bartholomäus...”

"You don't want to see this."

"But."

The AI opened a single ticket.

A single one.

The only one that didn't have a priority number.

Just a single line:

"The big update will begin soon."

And as sender:

"Monday."

Bartholomew discovers power: Admin rights

It was a Monday morning that reeked so much of a Monday that even the clocks had decided to run five minutes slower, just to stylistically underscore the misery. A Monday when the coffee held a bitter irony and the cafeteria, ten minutes after opening, looked as if two orcs, a hungry accountant, and a malfunctioning microwave had been having a political discussion there. And right in the middle of it all sat Bartholomew, a man who hadn't asked to be catapulted into the world of IT by some cosmic administrative glitch, and who still suspected to this day that the universe had deliberately put him on "expert mode" too early.

Bartholomew was typing back an email to a user whose printer wasn't working because—as it turned out—it had no power. "Have you checked if..." he began, but the sentence triggered a wave of existential weariness in him, the kind usually only experienced by second-year philosophy students. He saved the draft because Bartholomew was the kind of person who believed that fate might just grant him a better sentence if he only paused for a moment.

And at that exact moment the email arrived.

The subject line read: "Your rights have been expanded."

That wasn't a subject line. That was a threat. That was the kind of sentence usually reserved for dark rituals, political squabbles, or the opening of a particularly dangerous configuration window. Nobody wrote something like that harmlessly. Nobody. And certainly not a system. Because when systems wrote something, they did so with the cold-blooded elegance of a tax form: correct, unemotional, and yet somehow insulting.

Bartholomew clicked. Of course he clicked. Nobody wouldn't have clicked. Even a stone would have clicked if you'd put a mouse next to it. Curiosity was simply too great.

The email consisted of one sentence. A single sentence, which in its laconic style contained more menacing power than all the board meetings of the last five years combined:

"You now have administrator rights. Please use them responsibly."

It was like telling a cat, "Please use this lightsaber collection responsibly." Or a toddler, "Please be careful with the atomic bomb." It wasn't phrased unkindly. It was even polite. But somehow it sounded as if the system knew perfectly well that he wouldn't use it responsibly.

Bartholomew stared at the line. Then he stared at the wall. Then the wall stared back, which was surprising because walls don't usually do that. But maybe it was just the tea.

Admin rights. The word hung in his head like a particularly heavy thought.

Every IT department treated admin rights like a holy grail, something you wouldn't give to anyone who'd ever accidentally tried defragmenting a desktop. Admin rights were power. Pure, undiluted, cosmic power. The kind of power even printers respected—at least for a while before they rebelled anyway. Admin rights were the difference between "I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do" and "I could virtually turn this building into a frying pan."

And now... he had her.

Bartholomew made the first test. It was a cautious test, comparable to gently stroking a sleeping dragon's earlobe. He opened a folder that had always refused to open before. This time it opened immediately, as if the folder had suddenly decided that Bartholomew was attractive.

Bartholomew held his breath. Then he tried something braver: He opened the system settings. It worked. He opened the group policies. It still worked. He opened the user management window. The window opened, didn't bow, but it could have.

And then Bartholomew knew: This was no longer a normal Monday. This was the first day of a new era.

Before him stretched a list of names. Hundreds of names. Some underlined in red, some doubled, some with strange abbreviations like "old", "new", "really_new", "folder_copy_copy_FINAL" and other signs that the bureaucracy had been trying to understand itself for years – and failed.

Next to each name was a button. A button labeled: "Change permissions".

Bartholomew had the feeling that very dramatic music was playing somewhere in the background. Perhaps violins. Perhaps a choir of printers feeding paper in unison. It was hard to tell.

He didn't click. Not yet. Instead, he pondered how bizarre it was to even have admin rights. No one knew who decided such things. Some claimed the rights were managed by an immortal IT council meeting held deep in a hidden underground office. Others thought admin rights were created spontaneously when the universe made a mistake. Still others believed that somewhere an intern sat hammering away at keys, sometimes accidentally turning people into demigods.

But Bartholomew knew better. He knew his life was governed by dark administrative magic. And this was the next step: admin rights as a gift – or as a test.

He kept trying. And the more he clicked, the more the invisible architecture of the digital world opened up before him. The true inner workings of the system, like a curious marvel of rules, rights, and parameter lists, some so old that they were probably written in an archaic dialect spoken by computer scientists in long robes while hunched over stone tablets.

He saw logs. Endless logs. Logs of login attempts that should never have happened. Logs of printers that used more paper than was available. Logs of users who made the same wrong click five times while simultaneously insisting they hadn't done anything.

And then he saw the "Extended System Operations". They were glowing a warning red. He didn't know why they glowed red. But red was never a good color for things you were allowed to click.

Bartholomew raised his finger. He hesitated. He glanced at the canteen opposite, where someone was trying to pull a fork out of a toaster.

And then he thought, "What's the worst that can happen?"

The universe, hearing this question, noted very thoroughly: "Everything."

You have to understand: there are moments in a person's life when you intuitively sense you're at a crossroads. For most people, these are classic situations—the first day at work, the decision between vanilla or chocolate ice cream, or the moment you first realize that the printer isn't actually printing, but merely pretending to be one. Philosophically speaking, a printer is the universe's attempt to make fun of us. But for Bartholomew, the decisive moment was much simpler: he had administrator rights, and no one could stop him. Theoretically. In practice, probably. But at that moment, no one knew that yet.

The screen in front of him glowed expectantly, like a dog that knows it's about to execute a dangerous command. User management open, group policies open, advanced settings open—Bartholomew felt like a man who had accidentally unlocked all the doors of a very large building at once and was now standing in the middle of the entrance hall, unsure whether to take a step left, right, or run backward in a panic.

His colleague Klöterling from the next office, a man who looked like a walking stack of papers and sounded like a grumpy printer, noticed his unusually rigid posture. Klöterling was the kind of person who always gave the impression that he was only happy when someone else was unhappy. He had this talent for choosing the bleakest option in every situation, like a sommelier who only offers vinegar.

"Bartholomäus?" Klöterling asked, and even his tone of voice suggested he hoped Bartholomew had accidentally deleted a server. "You're sitting there like a broken installation. Has something happened?"

Bartholomew flinched as if he'd been caught sneaking into someone else's refrigerator. "Uh... no. Well... maybe. I got an email."

"We all get emails," Klöterling grumbled. "The trick is not to read them. That's self-protection."

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "This one was... different."

Klöterling raised an eyebrow, making him look as if someone had placed a file folder crookedly on a shelf. "Different from 'spam'?"

"Uh... different than... admin rights."

It became silent. Dead silent. So silent that even the photocopier stopped making inappropriate noises.

Klöterling's left eye twitched. It was unclear whether from shock, envy, or the knowledge that fate was playing a cruel trick on him in an unhealthy way. "Admin rights?" he repeated tonelessly. "You?"

Bartholomew nodded shyly.

For a while, Klöterling said nothing at all. Then he looked out the window as if expecting a train full of firefighters to pass by, ready to rush into the IT office at a moment's notice. "And... did you... click on anything?"

The question was absurdly naive. No one with a functioning brain and a newly acquired superpower would honestly answer "no." Of course, Bartholomew had clicked something. He had clicked everything.

But he wasn't stupid. So he lied. "No. I mean... nothing important."

That was technically true. Importance, after all, was in the eye of the beholder, and Bartholomew could not possibly have known that the "Extend auditing" option caused the server to monitor and record every step of every user in real time, including all typos and failed attempts to write the word "project plan" without umlauts.

Klöterling moved closer to his desk, leaned over his shoulder, and looked at the screen. His reaction was remarkable: he wheezed as if someone had shoved a particularly poisonous table in his face.

"Why... why is this open?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Because I'm an admin," Bartholomew whispered back, as if revealing a state secret.

Klötterling straightened up. It was a jerky, panicked movement, as if someone had pressed his personal reset button. "Listen, Bartholomew. Admin rights are not a reward. Admin rights are a responsibility. A heavy, serious, tragic responsibility. Like a goldfish suddenly running a nuclear power plant. Or an intern with a company car."

Bartholomew nodded vigorously. Too vigorously, considering that he was vibrating inside with excitement like a poorly calibrated scanner.

"You must not make any changes without prior approval!" Klötterling snapped. "No settings. No policies. No restarts. And under no circumstances should you open the 'Advanced System Operations' menu!"

Bartholomew smiled wryly. The "Advanced System Operations" menu had been open for twenty minutes and had shown him, among other things, a button with the promising name "Replication Reset" and the subtitle: "Use only in an absolute emergency." Bartholomew didn't know what exactly that emergency would be. But he was sure it would be impressive.

Klötterling returned to his desk – the step of a man who knew that something was going to happen today. And that it was guaranteed to be something bad.

Bartholomew remained alone with his power.

He continued experimenting, this time more cautiously, because he knew that Klötterling occasionally appeared out of nowhere for inexplicable reasons, especially at moments when someone was doing something that could potentially crash the server. He opened the security policies and was amazed by the sheer number of rules that existed to prevent users from doing things you wouldn't want to see even in horror movies. For example:

"The password must not be identical to the last 24 passwords."

or

"Users may not log in to more than 6 devices simultaneously, 2 of which may be toaster-like."

You could practically feel the desperation with which these rules had been created.

But then something happened that changed his life. A notification appeared in the bottom right corner, harmless, inconspicuous, innocent as a cat pretending it hadn't scratched the curtain.

"A user has requested: Reset password?"

A simple action. An everyday task for administrators. And yet, it was the first decision Bartholomäus had to make as an admin. Resetting a password meant responsibility. Power. And—what he didn't know—also a terrible danger, because the password of a certain Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt was legendary. For years, it had been "Schnuffi123," and she was firmly convinced that no one could ever guess it because no one knew that her hamster was named Schnuffi.

Bartholomew clicked. He reset it. He felt like a god.

A very small god. But still: a god.

And the universe sighed. Not annoyed. Not sad. But the way someone sighs when they know a lot of work is about to begin.

It's common knowledge that every great adventure—epic, tragic, or simply absurd—begins with a small, innocuous click. A click as innocent as a squirrel in the park plotting to steal someone's nuts. Bartholomew had made that click. And that click had opened a universe that for years had been reserved for the top

administrators—those mysterious figures who were never seen, whose names no one knew, and who presumably lived in a temple-like server room, protected by a Cerberus made of four broken network printers.

Bartholomew rocked slightly back and forth. The screen beamed at him. The "Show more requests" button pulsed slightly, as if it were breathing. And Bartholomew thought: Maybe I should just click it. Just look. Don't act. Just look. To Bartholomew's credit, though, he believed in something like New Year's resolutions. And like all people who believe in New Year's resolutions, these failed within exactly three seconds.

Behind the button was a list. A very long list. A list that seemed as if someone had meticulously recorded all the woes of the IT world – a kind of digital complaint register. It included:

"Printer 7B reports a paper jam even though no paper is inserted."

"User reports: 'Teams insulted me'."

(As it later turned out, Teams had simply said: "Reconnecting?" – which some people already consider an insult.)

"Server 12 reports doubts about its existence."

Bartholomew was unaware that Server 12 occasionally went into standby mode and then wrote things in the logs like "Why am I?" or "Is there more to life than update processes?" This was unpleasant for the server, but was tolerated as long as it restarted on time.

And then there was:

"Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt is asking for the fifth time why her password isn't working."

Bartholomew saw the request and felt a pang. A moral pang. A quiet but unmistakable hint from his conscience that perhaps he shouldn't yet venture into areas where real decisions were made. But his conscience, unfortunately, functioned about as well as a toaster without a plug. It was there, but nobody noticed it.

Bartholomew clicked.

He had already reset the password. Technically, the request was complete. The system asked if he wanted to inform the user. Of course he did. Because there were some buttons you couldn't not press. That was the law of nature.

He clicked "Yes".

The system sent a standard message. Unfortunately, at some point in his early IT career, Bartholomew had tried to make the default notification texts more "friendly." And that exact text was still saved.

Thus, at exactly 8:57 a.m., Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt received the following message:

"Your password has been reset. Welcome to the glorious realm of new login credentials! May your login be stable and your coffee never run dry."

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt had a sense of humor. Unfortunately, she hadn't applied it to emails. So the reply came at 8:59 a.m.:

"What does this mean???"

Bartholomew nervously clicked "Close". It felt like the moment you drop a glass and pretend it didn't happen, hoping no one heard anything.

But cosmic irony had big plans for that day.

While Bartholomew was still trying to shrink himself back, another message appeared. One that completely shook his newly discovered admin body:

"Another administrator has logged in."

That wasn't usually a problem. Administrators all had their place, like exotic animal species or particularly abstract accountants. But the message revealed the name.

Krawulinski.

Everyone in IT knew Krawulinski. He was the man who shouted passwords in all caps. A man who advocated values like, "If a server isn't working, it works better if you ignore it." He was the man who believed a firewall was a device you could blow out when it got warm. Some claimed Krawulinski had only stayed on for six years because no one dared to fire him. Some also said he was unfireable because he might have some kind of ancestral pact with the main server. Others, however, were convinced he had simply been forgotten.

And now he was online. In the admin console. At exactly the same time as Bartholomew.

That was bad. Not "bad as burnt toast." But "bad as two magicians trying to cast the same spell at the same time and accidentally opening a portal."

Bartholomew froze.

Suddenly a chat bubble appeared in the right corner. The admin bubble.

Krawulinski: "Who is there?"

That was clearly not a friendly tone. That was the tone of a man who had marked his territory and now found someone there who had moved the rug.

Bartholomew knew that his answer could decide between life and death – metaphorically speaking.

He typed carefully:

"Bartholomäus... Good morning."

It took 15 seconds. Fifteen seconds in which he was certain that somewhere in the server room a humming sound was emerging that sounded suspiciously like an "intruder alert".

Then came Krawulinski's answer:

"Why."

Not "Why are you here?" Not "Why do you have rights?" Just a single, existentially oppressive "Why?" A question that was meant more philosophically.

Perhaps he meant: Why do you exist? Perhaps he meant: Why today? Perhaps he meant: Why does my knee hurt?

But Bartholomew read it as:

"Why do YOU have admin rights, you inexperienced digital potato gnome?"

He frantically considered what to write. And while he was thinking, he unconsciously clicked – a sinister habit of people with too much power and too little self-protection.

His click landed in the "Subscribe to user actions" section.

A small, inconspicuous window opened.

"You will now receive real-time notifications about all actions taken by Administrator Krawulinski."

Bartholomew turned pale.

Because Krawulinski was already active.

Very active.

A new window popped up every second:

"Krawulinski applied a guideline."

"Krawulinski ignored a security warning."

"Krawulinski tried to ping the server by clapping on it."

(however he managed to do that)

Bartholomew was sweating. He was like someone who had inadvertently subscribed to the live commentary of a volcano that had just decided to erupt for the first time in 4000 years.

And then the inevitable happened:

"Krawulinski has restarted the global printer queue."

And before Bartholomew could protest, it was heard in the office: a dull, angry, synchronized whistling. All printers went into error mode simultaneously.

It was like a chorus of disappointed poltergeists.

Bartholomew knew he had to intervene. He was an administrator. It was his duty.

But how? How do you save a digital world that has just been threatened by a man who thought "RAM" was a star sign?

He took a deep breath.

The first major conflict over admin rights had begun.

When two administrators are operating the same system simultaneously, it's roughly equivalent to locking two deeply offended gods in the same phone booth and hoping they'll reach a polite agreement. Historically, this has never ended well. Usually, there were flashes of lightning, sometimes craters, and at least one very embarrassing incident involving spontaneously exploding filing cabinets. In the digital world, it's all a bit more subtle—but only a tiny bit. For Bartholomew, it felt just as dangerous.

He sat bolt upright in front of his screen, a mixture of panic, excitement, and the feeling of about to faint raging behind his eyes. The printers beeped in unison, Krawulinski was clearly already rampaging through the systems like a drunken wild goose, and his colleagues in the office looked up with the expressions of people who sense that something has gone catastrophically wrong but don't know who to point the finger at.

Bartholomew took a deep breath and scrolled through the flood of real-time news reports.

"Krawulinski deleted a policy."

"Krawulinski has restored a policy."

"Krawulinski deleted the same policy again."

"Krawulinski attempted to execute a file called 'wichtig.exe'."

Bartholomew shuddered. Wichtig.exe was one of those relics from the early days of IT that no one understood anymore, but no one dared delete because it was suspected of doing something significant—something important, in fact. Or perhaps the file did nothing at all and was merely a silent observer of the digital drama that unfolded daily. But in IT, everyone knew: you don't delete ancient files without any indication of their origin. Cute hamsters, maybe, parking tickets perhaps, but never "wichtig.exe".

And yet, there was the report:

"Execution failed. Reason: File is from 1997."

Bartholomew's eyes widened. He was certain that files from 1997 were usually blocked immediately by reality itself, because they were too old to function in a modern world. And yet—it was frightening that Krawulinski had tried to open them. If the man saw a door, he had to go through it. Even if a hungry Minotaur lived on the other side. Or a badly configured terminal server, which was even worse.

A ping sounded in the bottom left corner: A new message from Krawulinski.

"Listen, Bartholomew... What have you done?"

You could almost hear the "you" creeping through the network with a mocking emphasis. The kind of emphasis that said: "You're a minor bug in my vast, majestic admin universe."

Bartholomew replied cautiously:

"I... just reset my password."

That was only a small part of the truth, but at least technically correct. He had indeed reset a password. Krawulinski didn't need to know that he had opened three menus, viewed two rules, accidentally highlighted a file, and activated a global notification function.

The answer came promptly:

"Reset password? RESET PASSWORD? Do you even know what you've unleashed?"

Bartholomew typed hesitantly:

"A new password for Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt?"

A clattering sound came from the distance. It was probably just a coffee cup dropped by an overworked colleague. Or perhaps the scream of a printer suddenly questioning its purpose. In an office, you could never be quite sure.

Krawulinski's reply came in capital letters.

"NO. YOU HAVE TRIGGERED THE SYSTEM-WIDE EMPLOYMENT HISTORY INDICATION."

Bartholomew frowned. He'd never heard of it. And with good reason – nobody had ever heard of it. It was one of those things that shouldn't exist, but for some reason were embedded deep within the system, like an old sock behind the washing machine.

He googled the term in the system's internal dictionary. The dictionary replied:

"No results found. Perhaps you meant: 'Help'?"

That was rarely a good sign.

While Bartholomew was still considering whether he even wanted to ask the question, another message exploded next to his screen:

"Attention: System-wide indexing phase has started. Please avoid making any changes."

Bartholomew jumped up. In the office, his colleagues looked around nervously. A few were already standing, as if preparing for evacuation.

"What... is that?" someone asked from the accounting department's distant desk.

"That's... uh... normal!" Bartholomew exclaimed reflexively. It was the kind of "normal" that a volcano shouts just before it incinerates a small town.

The monitors in the office all started flickering at once. A very bad sign. Flickering monitors are the IT equivalent of horses in the Wild West getting nervous because they know someone is about to burst through the door and shout "Hands up!"

A new message appeared on Bartholomew's screen – this time in red, which represented the highest level of drama a computer could display without bursting into flames.

"System indexing: Active administrators are being synchronized."

Bartholomew felt his stomach attempt a backflip.

Synchronized? With Krawulinski?

A window appeared:

"Conflict detected."

Yes. That was hardly surprising.

"Two administrators are trying to access the same policy simultaneously."

Krawulinski replied in the admin chat:

"What are you doing??"

Bartholomew wrote honestly:

"I don't know it!"

The system responded faster than both:

"Conflict resolution will be initiated."

Bartholomew stared at the screen. Krawulinski stared somewhere else. All the printers weren't staring at anyone because printers can't do that, but if they could have, they would have.

Then a new line appeared:

"Proposed solution A: Both administrators may continue."

"Solution B: Administrator with higher priority takes over."

"Solution proposal C: The system randomly selects one of the two administrators."

Bartholomew choked. He knew exactly how the system defined "chance." Namely, like a grumpy die that had been lying on the wrong edge for years.

And then the selection process began.

An animation appeared. An animation that was about as over the top as a late-night teleshopping commercial: blinking stars, rotating wheels, an animated server with eyes dramatically raising its arms.

And then it said:

"Random selection is underway..."

Bartholomew held his breath.

"Elected Administrator: ..."

A small dot appeared. Then a second. Then a third.

And at that exact moment, the ceiling light in the office briefly went out, then on, then off again. Someone shouted. Someone else shouted, "I didn't do anything!"

The screen updated:

"Bartholomäus."

Bartholomew felt dizzy. He had been elected.

Not by people. Not through competence. Not through intention.

But rather through an algorithm that had probably been gathering dust for 15 years and was merely trying to pretend it still had control.

And Krawulinski?

He wrote:

"THE SYSTEM MAKES ERRORS!!!"

Bartholomew knew: This was the beginning of a completely new problem. Or a legend. Or a catastrophe.

Most likely a little bit of everything.

It was common knowledge—at least among those who ventured deep into the abyss of IT—that systems could make decisions so unpredictable they could only be described as cosmic whims. Perhaps it was due to ancient lines of code dating back to a time when programmers consumed coffee intravenously. Perhaps it was because systems sometimes developed a life of their own, since no one ever thought to ask them about their feelings. Whatever the reason, the system had decided.

And that system had chosen Bartholomew.

Bartholomew, the man who paused at the sight of an error message to consider whether it might be speaking about his life choices. Bartholomew, who had only been granted admin rights for half an hour and had already triggered a global indexing. Bartholomew, sitting utterly overwhelmed in front of his screen, as if the universe had suddenly bestowed upon him a kingdom and said, "Please manage this responsibly and without collisions."

The colleagues in the office had by now reached a state of collective alert, which could only be explained by the fact that they had all previously witnessed a single administrator do something that was later described in the log as an "irreversible event." And now they had a strong feeling that a second such event could occur today.

An employee from the accounting department – a man who loved Excel spreadsheets so much that he gave them names and sang them lullabies – shouted across the tables: "Why is the light flickering? I closed the balance sheet yesterday! This must not happen today!"

A muffled scream came from the canteen, followed by a loud "Ping!". That was either the microwave or a particularly enthusiastic toaster.

Bartholomew ignored the chaos and stared at the message:

"Elected Administrator: Bartholomew."

And directly below it said:

"Administrator Krawulinski has been temporarily restricted. Duration: unknown."

If there was one sentence that no one – whether normal, weird, or IT professional – ever wanted to read, it was this one.

Because "temporary" was a very flexible term. "Unknown" was an even more flexible term. And "restricted" probably meant, in Krawulinski's case, that he was standing in the server room delivering a very loud, very aggressive monologue while trying to convince the system to give him back control.

And indeed – at that exact moment, a message appeared from the lower part of the console:

"Attention: Administrator Krawulinski is attempting to log in locally."

Bartholomew swallowed.

A second report appeared:

"Warning: Administrator Krawulinski is attempting to operate the terminal by force."

That was a polite way of saying "He's hammering it with his fist." A third report followed:

"Critical: Administrator Krawulinski damaged a keyboard."

The system reports seemed increasingly desperate, as if they could no longer adequately describe reality and had to resort to stylistic devices reminiscent of literary impotence.

But now it was up to Bartholomew to act.

He had the power. He had responsibility. He had no idea what he was doing.

But that didn't stop him – it had never stopped anyone in IT from bravely pressing a button that would probably have been better left untouched.

He opened the policy that the system was currently trying to synchronize. It was the Global Printer Management Rule. A monstrous set of rules with more sub-items than the accounting department had folders. This rule determined who was allowed to print, when printing took place, how printing took place, why printing took place, and whether the printer even wanted to be printed.

The policy was... damaged. Not destroyed – just slightly burned, metaphorically speaking. Like a piece of toast that's still edible, but only if you don't tell anyone how long it's been in the toaster.

Krawulinski had opened them simultaneously. And Krawulinski had... tried to do things. Things one shouldn't do. Things that, in IT, only existed on a scale between "courageous" and "institutionally forbidden."

The two changes were visible:

Change by Krawulinski:

"Clean all printers automatically daily."

That sounded reasonable – until you realized that the cleaning process involved the printer printing full test pages. All printers. Every morning. Simultaneously. This would have meant that every day at 8:00 a.m., the entire office would have been engulfed in a storm of fifteen-page test patterns, colorful squares, and cryptic error messages.

Change made by Bartholomew:

He had clicked on "Show layout" – almost by accident. That was the change. Officially, it did nothing. Unofficially, however, without anyone knowing, it had loaded the policy from a decades-old backup.

A backup from 2005.

Back then, printers had different ideas about life. And different rules.

Bartholomew assessed the situation. He stood before a wreck of old software, aggressive bureaucracy, and Krawulinski. And now he had to define the conflict.

The system gave him three options:

Option A: Apply the policy according to Krawulinski's changes.

Option B: Apply the policy according to Bartholomew's view.

Option C: Reset policy completely.

Bartholomew sighed. He knew that in the IT universe, Option C was the equivalent of "Let's just burn the building down and start over." Option A was loud, dangerous, and would result in a morning paper massacre of biblical proportions. Option B was... unclear. Very unclear.

So he decided – with hesitant courage, which would later be described in IT history as a “presumed flash of inspiration” – to go for option B.

He clicked.

The system stopped.

All monitors in the office went black.

A collective scream filled the room. It was not a scream of panic, but of the typical resigned IT despair that arises when you know you'll have to get coffee soon to survive the problem.

Then, slowly, much too slowly, the monitors lit up again.

A message appeared:

"Policy successfully applied. Building-wide printer setting version 2005 active."

Nobody knew what that meant.

At least until the first printer started to talk.

Not literally – although worse things had been experienced in the office. He only made a noise, a very old, very contented noise. A noise that recalled times when printers still believed they were the kings of the office equipment world.

And for some reason, all the printers stopped malfunctioning at the same time.

They worked. Really. Cleanly. Quietly. Perfectly.

The colleagues stood up. They looked at each other. They looked at Bartholomew. They looked at the printers.

And then someone said – in a reverent whisper:

“How... did you do that?”

Bartholomew wanted to be honest. He wanted to say: "I have no idea." He wanted to say: "I just pressed something at random." He wanted to say: "Please never call my name again."

But instead, something completely different came out of his mouth:

"Administrative rights."

It wasn't a sentence. It was a revelation.

And while the impossible was happening throughout the office – printers were working – somewhere in the server room a man named Krawulinski was trying with his last bit of strength to pull a jammed keyboard out of the wall, and was shouting:

"THIS IS NOT OVER YET, BARTHOLOMEW!!!"

But on that day, at that moment, Bartholomew knew only one thing:

He had the power. And the universe had just begun to take that seriously.

The Login of Doom

It was a Tuesday morning that behaved like a Monday that, for some reason, wanted to give an encore. The air in the office was filled with the languid, undulating energy of a workforce whose minds had already checked the escape route before work even began. The coffee machine groaned, the copier grumbled indignantly, and somewhere on the network a printer quietly asked, "Why am I awake?", like a lethargic teenager who's just realized that school has already started.

Bartholomew entered the office with the same apprehensive air as someone who's just become rich or been cursed to death. Because that's usually how you feel when you have admin rights. It's a state somewhere between divine enlightenment, existential panic, and the vague feeling that you could accidentally put the entire network into a fake mode at any moment.

And yet he was in a surprisingly good mood. At least for him. His colleagues found this odd, as Bartholomäus was known for having a general mood that fluctuated between "tired" and "very tired." Today, however, he seemed... content.

This had less to do with work, however, and more to do with his weekend. For Bartholomew was—and this should not be underestimated—a man steeped in tradition. And one of his cherished traditions was to travel to the Great Chocolate Lake once a month. The Great Chocolate Lake was that legendary place people visited when they desperately needed peace and quiet or were ready to interact with things that were best left unexplained.

Bartholomew had been fishing for snapping pussies there. Yes. Snapping pussies. An astonishingly shy, but culinarily exquisite delicacy that lived only in the deepest regions of the Chocolate Lake and only surfaced when offered small coffee beans as bait. It sounds absurd, but that was precisely Bartholomew's life: a flawed mixture of peaceful absurdity and bureaucracy.

On Sunday evening, he had prepared a whole batch of these chocolate-covered marshmallow treats – crispy, buttery soft, lightly caramelized, and with a pinch of pepper, just as the chocolate-covered marshmallow tradition dictated. And being a sociable person – which was indeed true, even if many didn't notice because he rarely spoke – he had placed everything on a large tray.

This tray now sat on the windowsill in the IT office, wonderfully fragrant, a culinary monument laden with fragrant, slightly dangerous-looking, but utterly delicious snapping pussies. Bartholomew had added a handwritten sign:

"Please help yourself."

Fresh from the chocolate lake. Not vegan, but I was very happy.

Most colleagues hadn't even glanced at the tablet yet. Not out of disapproval, but because they were so busy talking about the flickering monitors from the previous day, the paradoxical behavior of the printers, or why Klöterling was still busy explaining to a colleague that a document never prints faster by shouting "Let's go!"

Even today, Klöterling was already in a grumpy mood. He glanced briefly at the tray. Then he looked at Bartholomew. Then back at the tray.

"What is it?" he asked in the tone of a man who already knew he wouldn't like the answer.

Bartholomew shrugged. "Snappy pussy."

Klöterling blinked twice. "Snap... what?"

"Mösen," Bartholomäus repeated. "Freshly caught. At the Chocolate Lake. I was there over the weekend."

Klöterling opened his mouth, closed it again, opened it once more, and finally decided to simply stop thinking about it. It was healthier that way. Some things about Bartholomew and his free time were among those mysteries the universe deliberately left unsolved so as not to overwhelm humans. Just like the question of why cats know exactly when you want to sleep.

But the tray of snapping pussies had an immediate side effect: it made the IT department eerily hospitable. People who would never have set foot in the IT office before—perhaps because they were afraid of technical terms like "patch" or "VPN"—now stopped, sniffed, and said, "Oh, that smells good," or "Can I try one?"

Bartholomew nodded kindly. Because Bartholomew was generous. Bartholomew was sociable. Bartholomew was – and this was new – dangerously relaxed.

But his good mood was not to last long. Because today something darker was in store. Something inevitable. Something that haunted every IT department like a dark prophecy.

The login of damnation.

The first clue came in the form of a small yellow message in the bottom right corner of his screen. A message that looked as if it hadn't been used for years and only still worked by pure chance.

"Attention: Critical login detected at Terminal 11."

That wouldn't normally have been noticeable. Logins happened. Logins were commonplace. Logins were the digital version of a handshake: brief, polite, and sometimes full of germs.

But the color of the message was unusual. Not red. Not yellow. Something in between. Like the bad feeling you get when you know something very unpleasant is about to happen.

Bartholomew opened the log window.

A single entry blinked there. An entry that reeked of metallic fate.

User: "SYSTEM_UNDEFINED"

Login status: "Successful"

Location: Terminal 11 (Basement Room B – Storage Room)

Bartholomew's eyebrow twitched.

He knew perfectly well: Terminal 11 hadn't been used for years. It had been shut down because it... did things. Inexplicable things. Things that couldn't be mentioned in a report without later being subjected to a psychological evaluation.

And now someone was logged in there.

Or something.

Bartholomew sensed the air around him changing – not literally, but the feeling was there. It was the kind of feeling IT employees get when an update takes too long or when the coffee machine makes a noise that isn't in the instruction manual.

He stood up.

Slowly. Hesitantly. Like a man who knows he has to enter a place he dislikes but cannot ignore.

Klötterling noticed it immediately. "Where are you going?" he asked suspiciously.

"Cellar," said Bartholomew.

"Why?"

"Terminal 11."

Klötterling's face slipped from his grasp so quickly it almost made a noise. "Oh no. Not Terminal 11. That thing... that thing is cursed! Since 2018!"

Bartholomew nodded. He knew.

Everyone knew it. Only the system didn't know it – or it didn't want to know it.

The login of damnation had begun.

And Bartholomew knew: Admin rights wouldn't help him this time.

But he left anyway.

Because sometimes, admin rights are just a key. And sometimes that key opens doors that should never have been opened.

There are places in every building you wouldn't willingly visit. Dark copy rooms. Archive cabinets where dust motes have established their kingdom. And, of course, basement storage rooms filled with forgotten hardware that remembers only two things: first, its own uselessness, and second, the sound it made in its prime to justify its existence. Terminal 11 was just such a place. It was more than that. Terminal 11 was a legend. A dark, slightly moldy legend with stained carpeting and a smell that defied easy description.

You could have said it smelled like "electronics that'd overthought things" or "cables laid loose and anxious." But the truth was much worse: Terminal 11 smelled like office coffee brewed in 2014 and untouched since. Some said you could hear voices in the room. Others said an intern once disappeared there. And some even claimed the room had a consciousness of its own. No one ever checked—out of self-preservation.

Bartholomew mustered all his courage and descended the cellar stairs. His footsteps echoed, far too loudly for the narrow passages. Each clack-clack sounded like the hammering of a judge delivering a verdict. And the verdict was presumably: "You are about to see something you shouldn't have seen."

On the way, one of the snapping worms rustled softly in his jacket pocket. He'd brought one along—just in case he got hungry on the way. Or if he needed to bribe someone. Nobody knew if the "creatures" in the cellar liked snapping worms. But Bartholomew had decided that you generally got further with culinary specialties than without. It was a philosophy that had served him quite well so far.

He reached the door. On it was a faded sign:

"Storage room B. Access only for authorized personnel."

Years ago, someone had written the following underneath it in permanent marker:

"And please only enter if you are suicidal. Thank you."

Someone else had added below:

"Seriously."

Bartholomew opened the door. A soft squeak sounded. A squeak that sounded as if the door had been insulted and now wanted to take revenge.

The room was dimly lit, with only a single fluorescent light flickering like a tired, ghostly parody of a firefly. Shelves lined the walls, filled with cables, spare parts, and things one would only touch in extreme emergencies. A gray carpet lay on the floor, its pattern once considered "clever" but now deemed "symptomatic of noughties depression."

And there, in the far corner, stood Terminal 11. An old PC, so rickety and rusted with a certain dignity that you almost felt sorry for it. It looked like it came from a time when screens were so large they could replace a heater on their own. An old CRT monitor, its front panel more scratched than visible pixels. The casing was covered with stickers that were long since illegible. You could only guess that slogans like "My other computer is a server" or "Don't Panic" had once been written there.

A message flickered on the screen.

And upon closer inspection, Bartholomew's worst fears were confirmed:

The terminal was logged in.

Did not enter sleep mode. Did not crash. Did not collapse in despair. No.

Logged in.

And that was with a user who, according to the system, didn't even exist.

SYSTEM_UNDEFINED

Bartholomew took a breath. His breath created small swirls of dust that looked like confused ghosts.

He knew what he had to do. He had to find out who – or what – had logged in. It was his duty as an administrator. And it was the kind of duty that, in IT, is generally described as: "I hope you have a will."

He carefully felt for the mouse. It moved under his hand like an animal pretending to be dead to avoid being eaten.

One click. Double click. The monitor crackled softly, as if it wanted to contradict him.

The console opened.

A window appeared. A window that looked as if it had been created with dark intent.

LOGIN PROTOCOL – TERMINAL 11

The list started a few minutes ago. A single entry. One.

Time: 9:12 AM

User: SYSTEM_UNDEFINED

Authentication: Successful

Startup process: Activated

Secondary operation: "Entity check" is running...

Bartholomew frowned.

"Entity checking" was not a normal system command. Entity checking was a term that systems only used when they were checking whether there was something on the network that shouldn't have been on the network.

Something unloaded. Something unregistered. Something not covered by the company contract.

The monitor flickered. A humming sound filled the room.

Then a new line appeared:

"Deviation detected."

Bartholomew froze.

"Analysis of the deviation is underway..."

He swallowed.

"The deviation is within the building."

He was sweating.

"Deviation is inhuman."

A cold shiver ran down his back.

"Deviation moves."

He looked around. Slowly. Very slowly. That was exactly the moment when you hoped that the deviation was simply an exceptionally large clump of dust.

But then the last line appeared:

"The deviation is: BEHIND YOU."

Bartholomew turned around. Too quickly. Too panicky.

But behind him stood only a shelf. An old, crooked shelf. With boxes. And cleaning supplies. And a dusty keyboard.

No deviation.

At least nothing visibly different.

The monitor flickered again. The message updated.

"The deviation has shifted."

Bartholomew stared at the screen. He understood the words. But his brain refused to categorize them meaningfully.

Moved?

Like a document?

Or like a lost ballpoint pen?

Or like a toddler who suddenly sits in the kitchen cupboard?

Before he could think about it, a new line appeared:

"Deviation seeks... Administrator."

"Oh," said Bartholomew. It was a small, quiet, resigned "Oh." The "Oh" of a man who knew his day was now officially ruined.

And then – very quietly, close, much too close – he heard something rustling.

Not much. Just a small, barely perceptible rustling.

Bartholomew instinctively reached into his pocket. His hand found the snapping pussy.

A strange thought pierced his mind:

Maybe it will help.

He took it out. A small piece.
Warm. Lightly caramelized. Fragrant.

And he said – more to himself than to the world:

"Please... do not be a mistake in the system."

He didn't know if he was talking to the terminal. Or to the deviation. Or to his own courage.

But something answered.

A light crackling sound. A dull knocking. A shadow that moved.

Bartholomew did the only logical thing:

He held the snapping pussy in front of him.

If the deviation was of culinary interest.

And then he said — in a trembling voice:

"Um... hungry?"

Bartholomew stood there like a man who had just discovered that his refrigerator could talk and had been watching him snack at midnight for years. In one hand he bravely held a slightly warmed-up snack, in the other nothing but a very shaky hope that culinary arts might just be the solution to those problems that even seasoned IT professionals usually dismiss with "Oh no..." The shadow in the room moved again. Not threateningly, but rather in the way a shadow moves when it's surprised to even exist.

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "I... uh... have food." It sounded helpless. No, worse: It sounded like someone trying to calm a burglar with a piece of cake. But sometimes cake was better than violence, and Snapmöse were probably divine in that category.

Nothing happened for a while. The buzzing neon light above him flickered ominously, as if it had decided to contribute to the dramatic atmosphere. The terminal blinked, crackled, and displayed more cryptic messages that Bartholomew preferred not to read too closely. And then... the shadow moved forward a little.

Not much. Just enough for Bartholomew to feel the hairs on his back stand on end and to form a union determined to demand pay raises.

He lifted the snapping pussy a little closer. "Really fresh," he said in a voice suspiciously similar to the beeping of a smoke detector. "Caught at the Chocolate Lake. Genuine handiwork." He didn't know himself why he suddenly sounded like an over-enthusiastic barker, but desperate situations call for desperate sales strategies.

Then he saw it. A movement. Very small. Very quiet. And far too organic to be technical in nature.

A small figure crawled out from between two forgotten cardboard boxes.

Bartholomew blinked. He blinked again. Then he felt a deep, inner need to blink once more.

A being stood before him.

A creature that, with a generous interpretation, could be described as "fluffy." Or "confused." Or "unregistered." It had two eyes that looked as if someone had pressed glass marbles into an old piece of carpet. It had small hands that jiggled nervously, and it looked as if it might attack or ask for a pen at any moment.

It tiptoed uncertainly in place. Then it fixed its murmuring button eyes on Bartholomew.

And on the snapping pussy.

Bartholomew's thoughts raced. Hunger? Aggression? Culinary curiosity? Or was the creature simply reconsidering its dietary preferences?

He extended his hand with the snapping vulva further. "Do you want to?"

The creature sniffed. A millisecond later, it snapped.

Bartholomew recoiled, but the creature didn't snap at him—it only snapped at the snapping vulva. With a speed that suggested it had undergone years of ninja training. And then the most surprising thing of all happened:

The creature sat down. Just like that. As if it had decided:
This person is useful. He has food. I'll stay.

It began to crunch contentedly. A sound that was roughly like someone eating very small pebbles.

Bartholomew stared at it. The creature stared back. Chewing.

The terminal flickered and displayed:

"Deviation analyzed."

A break. A break that was far too long.

"Deviation: Not hostile."

Bartholomew breathed a sigh of relief. That was a mistake.

Because the next line read:

"Deviation: Hunger."

Bartholomew instinctively reached into his jacket pocket. He had one less penis than he thought. He swallowed.

"Uh, little one? I only have one more piece." He took it out. The creature giggled. Or farted. It was hard to tell.

Then suddenly two more shadows scrambled out of the darkness.

Bartholomew froze. Two more beings. The same button eyes. The same carpet aesthetic. The same small hands, waving meaningfully.

And they stared at him.

And they stared at his hand.

And then they stared at the last remaining bit of Schnappmöse.

He raised his hands. "Okay, okay... we can resolve this peacefully." He looked at the last piece. Then at the three beings. Then back at the piece.

The creatures moved closer. A hesitant step.
Another one. Another one.

The system wrote:

"Deviation duplicated."

"Deviation duplicates again."

"Population is increasing."

That was definitely not reassuring.

Bartholomew thought feverishly. He had no more snacks. No more snacks. No more spare biscuits. Not even a granola bar, which he usually always carried for emergencies.

So he did the only thing he could think of:

He sat down too. Slowly. Carefully. The way you sit next to a wild animal and hope it thinks you're useless.

The three beings continued to stare at him, unchanged. It was hard to tell if they wanted something from him. Affection, perhaps? Or help with his tax return? Or were they simply curious about his shoes?

He smiled tentatively. "I... am Bartholomew."

The creatures did not react.

Except for one. The middle one raised its hand, pointed a tiny claw at its face, and made a noise.

A very specific sound.

"Moo."

Bartholomew blinked. "Mo... what?"

"Moo," the creature repeated more seriously, as if to emphasize that it would not negotiate.

The other two joined in. "Moo!" "Moo."

Bartholomew nodded slowly. "Okay. So you are... Möhs."

It was actually a name he found acceptable. It didn't sound threatening. It didn't sound technological. It sounded more like a mixture of "carrot," "seagull," and "piece of furniture." And that somehow fit.

The three Möhs seemed content. They moved closer. They sniffed his trousers. They nudged his shoes. They climbed up him like very soft koalas with poor balance.

It was absurd. It was crazy. It was... kind of cute.

Until the terminal screen blinked again.

"Attention: Deviation has detected administrator rights."

Bartholomew froze.

"Deviation attempts access."

"Uh... pardon?", he whispered.

The Möhs stared at him. Then they stared at his chest.

More precisely: His ID card. His employee ID card. The chip inside it. The chip that identified him: Administrator.

He slowly raised his ID card. The Möhs followed him with their eyes. Synchronized. Disturbingly synchronized.

Bartholomew lowered his ID again. The Möhs followed. Synchronized.

Then one of the Möhs suddenly climbed onto his shoulder, grabbed the ID card and squeaked a noise that sounded a lot like "Loot!"

"No!" cried Bartholomew. "Not that! This is important!"

But Möh was already on the run. The others followed. With his ID.

And the terminal wrote:

"Deviation has gained administrator rights."

Bartholomew jumped up.

"Oh no, no, no, NO!"

He rushed after the Möhs, while in the basement the neon tube began to laugh.

At least that's how it sounded.

And not like an ordinary person who just wants to get from A to B, but like someone who is preceded by three small furry creatures with their administrator badges, cheerfully squeaking sounds that sounded suspiciously like "Ha! Ha! We have the power!"

The cellar corridor was long, narrow, and crisscrossed with cables that looked like sleeping snakes, just waiting for someone to trip so they could claim it was self-defense. Bartholomew darted over them with an elegance completely out of character. As he did so, he shouted:

"GIVE THAT BACK TO ME! THAT'S NOT FOR PLAYING!"

But nobody listened to him. Nobody except the Möhs. And they decided to run even faster.

It was an absurd sight: Three furry basement creatures, resembling carpet scraps with eyes, raced down the hallway, wearing ID badges that didn't belong to them. Behind them, a completely distraught IT administrator tried to save his life—and network security.

It was a chase race of a special kind. Fluffy in front. Sweaty in back.

And in the background, a forgotten robot vacuum cleaner watched on, certain that it wasn't working a shift today.

The Möhs turned the corner, weaved under a pile of yellowed files, and Bartholomäus stumbled behind them. He slipped on a brochure from 2009 that read:

"Digitalization – We are ready!"

The universe could not have been more ironic.

He scrambled to his feet and sprinted on. The Möhs disappeared through a half-open door – the door to the so-called "cable room." A room that lived up to its name: every cable that had ever existed or would ever exist in this building was stored there, crumpled up in a cluster of spheres of pure chaos.

Bartholomew pushed open the door. And stopped. Because the scene before him was... impressive.

The Möhs had made themselves comfortable in the cable hell. In the middle of the room stood a small, old server rack, completely overgrown with cables of every color. The Möhs climbed around on it like mountaineers on an expedition, and the Möh with the ID badge had positioned himself on top of the rack as if he were the king of the cables.

"MÖHHH!" he shouted triumphantly, holding up his ID card like a trophy.

Bartholomew paused. Breathed. Gathered courage. And spoke in a tone he had learned from a documentary about animal behavior:

"Okay... calm down... this is a company ID card. Not a toy. And certainly not for beings who don't have an employment contract."

One of the Möhs seemed offended and gave him a look as if he were about to complain to the HR department about discrimination.

The terminal screen in the basement flashed at that moment and sent a message over the central loudspeaker system (which no one had used for years because it sounded like water damage with a voice):

"Warning: Unauthorized access to admin rights detected."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

Of course. Naturally the system reported that now.

Then came a second message:

"Warning: Admin rights will be duplicated..."

Bartholomew's eyes widened.

"YOU-PLI-DECORATED??? NO!!!"

He jumped forward. The cabinet shook. The Möhs shrieked. The "King of Cables" almost lost his footing, but held on tight and waved his ID card like a magic card in a crazy card game.

The ID card was flashing. The chip inside was flashing. And then the third message appeared:

"New administrator created: Möh_01"

Bartholomew sank to his knees.

Not from exhaustion. Not from pain.

But out of sheer desperation.

A Möh. A Möh was now the administrator.

He raised his hands to the sky – or rather to the ceiling of the cable room, which was full of cobwebs and old reminder letters – and shouted:

"NO! That goes against every company policy that has ever existed!"

The Möh on the cupboard – Möh_01, as the system now called it – emitted a satisfied, slightly arrogant "Möh."

Then he pressed – presumably by mistake – on the chip of the ID card with his little paw.

The system reacted immediately:

"Administrator Möh_01 has requested changes to the network structure."

Bartholomew jumped up.

"NOT THAT!!!"

But it was too late.

The server rack emitted a deep, drawn-out sound. Something between "KRSSSSST-BZZT" and "I'm doing something terrible, but nobody can stop me!"

Lights flickered. Cables vibrated. The network began to hum like an angry hornet colony.

And then – very gently, almost sweetly – another announcement sounded:

"Administrator Möh_01 has changed the password for global network access."

Bartholomew sank to the ground again.

"What is it?" he whispered.

The answer came without mercy:

"New password: Möhhhhhhh!"

Bartholomew stared into space.

He said nothing.

He thought nothing.

He felt only the quiet, stinging realization of a man who knew that the company was now run by a furry ball whose main qualification was grabbing food and climbing on cables.

The Möhs cheered. They jumped. They celebrated. They rolled each other down and back up the cupboard as if they had just climbed Mount Olympus.

Bartholomew, on the other hand, slowly stood up again and said with a spark of dignity in his voice:

"You... give me... this... ID back."

He took a step. The Möhs watched him. A second step. The Möhs moved closer together. A third step...

But then the inevitable happened:

A moo picked up the ID card – and ate it.

Completely. With one bite. In such a horribly efficient process that Bartholomew could only whisper "...No." in shock.

A chewing sound. A swallow. A contented "Moo."

And it was gone. The ID. The chip. The only hope.

And the terminal in the basement reported:

"Administrator Möh_01 – Authorization confirmed."

Bartholomew felt reality stagger past him for a moment, apologize briefly, and then vomit into a corner.

He was ruined. The network was ruined. The day was ruined.

And the Möhs? They had just learned that power tastes delicious.

Bartholomew stood in the cable room like a man to whom fate had just thrust a bag of problems, emblazoned with the words "HAVE FUN WITH IT" in large letters. The Möhs, on the other hand, celebrated their newfound administrative power with the enthusiasm of a horde of first-graders who had just discovered that glue can be drunk.

The terminal in the basement, which still made itself known through walls, concrete and despair with its metallic, scratching loudspeakers, announced:

"Administrator Möh_01 has made changes to the Group Policy Set."

Bartholomew shouted back: "STOP THAT IMMEDIATELY!!!"

But the moo just gave a triumphant "Moooo" and pressed the chip again, which was now slowly migrating somewhere in its digestive system towards "catastrophic consequences".

The server rack was flashing purple. Purple was a color that even IT didn't know what it meant. Red was alarm. Yellow was warning. Blue was "Please wait." Green was "Everything's fine." Purple, however, meant "We're all going down, but in style."

The other Möhs hopped in a circle and repeated singing: "Möh. Möh. Möhhhhh!"

It sounded frighteningly rhythmic. Almost like a ritual. And as if they were about to initiate a global reboot of the network together, just because it was fun.

Bartholomew braced himself on his knees. His IT training hadn't prepared him for this moment. No "Microsoft for Advanced Users" seminar. No "Certified Problem Manager" certification. Not even the legendary, whispered handbook:

"When everything is on fire – smile so that you are not held responsible."

None of that covered the situation: A Möh had admin rights. Not metaphorically. Not jokingly. Really.

He tried to speak in a calm voice: "Listen, you little... uh... creatures. I know power tastes good. Believe me, I discovered admin rights myself yesterday. But... you can't... just... change things."

The king shag on the cupboard – Shag_01 – stared at him with that blank expression only creatures capable of who have no idea what a law is and why humans ever invented such a thing. Then he pressed a button.

The monitor lit up:

"Admin rule: All passwords must be at least 40 characters long in the future."

Bartholomew stared, mouth agape. "NO! THE ACCOUNTING INTERN IS ONLY 19! HE CAN'T DO THAT!"

But the system accepted the change immediately.

Then the next message appeared:

"Admin rule: All users must log in again every 2 minutes."

Bartholomew almost fell over.

This wasn't just chaos. This was pure digital terrorism.

The following would now happen in the office upstairs:

1. Someone is logging in right now.
2. After exactly 120 seconds, the message would appear: "Session expired."
3. A horrified scream would follow.
4. Krawulinski would yell: "WHO IS DOING THIS?!"
5. And the whole thing would repeat itself endlessly.

The thought of it made Bartholomew feel nauseous.

"Stop it!" he pleaded. "Please, stop it!"

A woman next to him started nibbling at his trousers. Not out of aggression, but rather out of interest, or boredom, or in the hope of finding one last chick somewhere.

"I have NONE left!" lamented Bartholomew. "That's it! They're all gone! You ate them!"

The Möhs stopped and stared at him. All three at once. With huge, dark, completely innocent button eyes.

It was a moment that affected his psyche so deeply that he briefly thought:

Maybe... could I cook some? Right now? Somehow?

But no. He may have been that sociable at the chocolate lake, but he wouldn't leave the basement without getting his admin rights back. The price was too high. Otherwise, the coffee machines would be going through reboot loops tomorrow.

He had to act. He had to act quickly. And he had to – reluctantly, but inevitably – use his best trick.

His determination.

Bartholomew straightened up. Slowly. With the gravitas of a man who has just accepted that he may have to launch some kind of diplomatic assault against a group of furry creatures.

“Listen to me,” he said. “I am Bartholomew. And I am an administrator.”

The Möhs tilted their heads. Interested. Suspicious. Perhaps a little hungry.

"I... have seen things you wouldn't understand. I've pacified printers. I've set passwords that should never have existed. I've enforced the 2005 global printer rule! Do you know what that means?"

He paused briefly.

He himself no longer knew what it had meant.

"Uh... never mind. Anyway: I am the guardian of this network. And you... should return your ID cards. If only so that you don't end up in some database in a week as 'FORMER ADMINISTRATOR - DIFFERENCE DUE TO DIGESTION'."

The Möhs nodded. All of them. In unison. Too unison.

And then... a miracle happened.

The king moorhen jumped down from the cupboard, waddled a few steps towards Bartholomew – and belched.

A soft, high-pitched "PRRRT."

And the ID card fell out. Completely intact. With a thin film of slime. But technically ready for use.

Bartholomew stared at it. "...I take this as a peace offering."

He carefully picked up the ID card. The chip was blinking. Still working. Absolutely unbelievable.

The terminal speaker repeated:

"Administrator access revoked: Möh_01."

"Administrator access reset: Bartholomew."

Bartholomew sank to the ground. He laughed. He cried.

He briefly hugged the ID card. Möh patted him on the shoulder as if he were an exceptionally understanding colleague.

He took a deep breath.

“Thank you,” he said.

The Möhs answered in unison:

"Moo."

He nodded. They nodded. It felt like a peace treaty.

Then the door to the cable room opened.

And there stood Krawulinski. His face red. His hair electric. His hands trembling.

“BARTHOLOME,” he snarled. “WHY... DID I HAVE TO... REGISTER TWENTY-SEVEN TIMES?!”

Bartholomew smiled wryly. "Long story."

The Möhs were standing behind him. Krawulinski saw them. They saw Krawulinski.

Then the Möhs said:

"Moo!"

And Krawulinski screamed like a man who had finally understood that his professional life would never be normal again.

Bartholomew sighed.

The login of damnation was over.

At least for today.

User versus Administrator: A War Without Rules

It was a Wednesday that felt like a Monday disguised as a Friday to lull the staff into a false sense of security. The IT department was unusually quiet—not because everything was working, but because Bartholomew sat exasperated in his chair, forehead on the desk, taking deep breaths like a man who, within 24 hours, had been worshipped by printers, succeeded by Möhs, and cursed by Krawulinski.

The Möhs had crawled back into their cable den, sated, content, and presumably busy inventing new password rules for each other in Dungeon Master-style games. The server rack was still vibrating slightly, as if it had a hangover. And in the office above Bartholomäus, a mood was raging, somewhere between revolutionary fervor, collective caffeine withdrawal, and "We need a company meeting!"

Because something had happened.

Something inevitable.

Something that HAD to happen if you gave a Möh uncontrolled access to the network for just ten minutes:

The users were furious.

The reports trickled into the helpdesk ticket system like panicked carrier pigeons:

"Why do I have to log in every 2 minutes?!"

"My password now has 40 characters! WHY?!"

"My PC talks to me."

"The printer wants to know my tax class."

"I think my computer just addressed me informally."

"Why is the Wi-Fi network now called 'MöhNetzwerk_01'?!"

"I couldn't log in because my last name supposedly doesn't meet the security requirements???"

Bartholomew knew that this could only mean one thing:

The users had decided to go to war.

Not in a military sense—they wore neither armor nor lances (although Klöterling had for a time considered a stapler a weapon). No, the war that was about to begin was more subtle. More insidious. More psychological. A form of war that could only exist in the office: the war between user and administrator.

It was a war without rules because—and this has been historically proven—users didn't follow rules. Not even the basic rules of digital civilization, such as "Don't click on emails saying you've won an iPhone." Or "Don't save your files to the desktop folder called 'New Folder (7)'." Or "The Wi-Fi password isn't '1234'."

Bartholomew slowly raised his head. His colleagues in IT looked at him as if he were the captain of a ship heading straight for an iceberg. And the captain knew it. And the captain wasn't even wearing a jacket.

Klöterling stood next to him with his arms crossed. "The staff is upset," he said in a tone that suggested "upset" was the mildest word he could find.

"How... upset?" murmured Bartholomew.

Klöterling nodded towards the hallway.

And there Bartholomew saw her.

The users.

They came down the corridor like a coordinated wave of passive-aggressive running movements, the kind only people whose computers had just crashed them in the middle of a Word document could perform.

In front of them strode Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt, moving with a vehemence that made it clear she was prepared to personally submit a petition against everything digital. Behind her trotted Mr. Blümel, who had thrown his arms up in the air and had been convinced since 2017 that computers were fundamentally working against him personally.

And there—way in the back—was Wummerling from accounting. The very embodiment of an Excel spreadsheet. His face was white, as if he'd just lost a draft. An unsaved draft.

That was dangerous. Extremely dangerous.

When an Excel user loses their file, they don't react like a normal person. A normal person would cry. An Excel user, however, would sue the network.

The group stopped in front of the IT office.

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt cleared her throat. It was a throat clearing one usually only hears in courtrooms.

"We need to talk," she said.

Bartholomew nodded. He knew: This was not an invitation. This was a summons.

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt entered the office, her arms crossed, as if she had been personally tasked with restoring digital order.

"Mr. Bartholomew," she began in a tone somewhere between respectful and "You are the reason I had to drink wine last night," "we had... problems today."

“Problems?” asked Bartholomew, even though he knew better.

"Problems!" repeated Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt. "I've logged in 48 times today!"

“Fifty-two,” Mr. Blümel called from the background.

“ONE HUNDRED ZERO EIGHTEEN,” Wummerling added with a look that would be considered too threatening even in horror films.

Bartholomew felt his heart sink. When had this happened? When had he become administrator? When had everything spiraled so out of control?

Oh yes. When a moo ate his ID card.

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt stepped closer. “We know that there were... special circumstances yesterday.”

Bartholomew flinched.

Please don't mention the Möhs... please don't mention the Möhs...

“...and the thing with... uh... the little furry things in the basement...”

Damned.

“...but that doesn’t explain why my password now consists of thirty-seven percent special characters!”

Bartholomew tried diplomacy. "A... security update?"

Klötterling coughed. Loudly. Unnaturally loudly.

Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt looked at him. He fell silent.

Mr. Blümel raised a hand. “And why...” — his voice trembled with genuine despair — “...was my mouse set to Arabic this morning? I don’t even speak Arabic!”

Bartholomew glanced at the terminal. An inconspicuous yellow message was flashing there:

"Language settings have been changed by administrator Möh_01."

He closed the message quickly. Very quickly.

“Dear colleagues,” Bartholomew began solemnly, “I can explain what has happened.”

He couldn't explain anything. But that didn't matter.

Because hordes of users never demanded explanations—they demanded solutions. Or blood. Depending on their mood that day.

“Please,” said Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt. “Do so.”

Bartholomew opened his mouth.

And it didn't produce a single sound.

Instead, a noise suddenly came from his stomach, clearly indicating that he had not eaten anything since the previous evening because Möhs had spoiled his appetite.

A moo emerged from under the cable door and stood next to Bartholomew's foot. It went "Moo."

Bartholomew discreetly stepped aside to cover him. The users stared.

"Was that...?", asked Mr. Blümel.

"No."

"But I have—"

"NO."

Users exchanged glances. Dangerous glances. Digital guillotine glances.

Then Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt said the sentence that every IT professional fears:

"We... want changes."

Bartholomew swallowed. "Which ones?"

She raised her hand.

"ALL."

Bartholomew sighed, sat up straight, adjusted the monitor and said:

"Good. Then the war begins now."

The users looked at him, puzzled. "Excuse me?"

Bartholomew smiled a tired but determined smile.

"War without rules. User versus administrator. And I... am ready."

Behind him, the bleat made a very determined "BEEH."

It was clear:

The war had begun.

In the war between users and administrators, there are two immutable laws. The first is: Users always believe they are right. The second is: Users are never right. Both laws are true, even though they contradict each other, mainly because office reality usually has the same characteristics as a poorly programmed role-playing game: illogical, frustrating, and full of bugs that nobody wants to fix because the only one who understands the code has been on sick leave since 2009.

Keeping these two laws in mind—and also the fact that his foot was currently being embraced by a Möh—Bartholomew knew he would suffer. He didn't know, however, how much.

The crowd of users stood before him like a tribunal of passive-aggressive demigods. In the front row was Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt, carrying the dignity of the entire company on her shoulders (with highly questionable stability). Next to her was Mr. Blümel, whose mouse was still performing sideways, almost Arabic, movements, even though he had shaken it three times, insulted it four times, and threatened it once with a ruler. Wummerling from accounting balanced an Excel file trembling on a USB stick as if it were a newborn baby.

The Möhs moved cautiously between the users' legs, curious but not hostile. The users apparently thought they were some new ergonomic foot warmers the company had acquired. No one asked any questions. That was for the best.

“Mr. Bartholomew,” began Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt, handling each letter like a scalpel, “we demand that all changes be reversed immediately. Immediately.”

Bartholomew nodded slowly. "Of course. But... I'd like to remind you that I wasn't the one who caused it."

"WHAT DID YOU SAY?!" Krawulinski suddenly roared, having apparently jumped in through an open window or teleported in. No one knew how he did it. Presumably, he didn't know himself.

Bartholomew sighed. "I... didn't say I."

“Yes, you do,” said Klöterling matter-of-factly. “Absolutely.”

Bartholomew pressed his hand to his face. “No. I meant—”

A blenny calmly crawled onto his lap and began nibbling at his sleeve. Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt's eyes widened. "What... IS that?"

“A cable creature,” Krawulinski snapped immediately, and with absolute conviction. “It happens. Cable nest. Mutation. Office climate. Vitamin deficiency. You know the drill.”

All users nodded. Of course.

Cable management. Sure. That made absolutely... no sense whatsoever. But they didn't want any additional problems today, so they accepted it.

“Well,” continued Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt, “the situation is as follows: The staff demands stability. The staff demands reliability. And the staff demands that I don’t have to enter my password again today.”

“But... safety—” Bartholomew began.

“—is overrated!” several users shouted in unison.

“I was logged out five times today, when all I wanted to do was put a comma!” complained Wummerling, who was fiddling so nervously with his USB stick that it looked as if he were planning a rampage with spreadsheets.

“The network also demands stability!” Bartholomew retorted. “And these changes were...!” He stopped. He wanted to say “not my fault.” But that was a dangerous sentence. Especially if the truth was: “Some moo ate my ID password and imposed a dictatorial password rule.”

Nobody would believe that. Except for the two Möhs who were currently trying to climb onto the table.

“...complicated,” Bartholomew finally said.

"Complicated?" asked Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt sharply.

"Complicated," confirmed Klöterling, because he had realized that it was better to present a united front.

"Complicated," whispered the terminal speaker in a echoing error message. The users flinched. Nobody mentioned it.

"So," said Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt sternly. "What do you intend to do?"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Clean up the system. Correct the policies. Normalize the password requirements. Rename the Wi-Fi network. And declutter the user profiles."

The users looked at each other. That was... That was more than they had expected.

"Only..." added Bartholomew, "that will take time."

"How long?" Blümel asked suspiciously.

"A few hours."

"HOW MANY hours?" demanded Wummerling with the desperation of a man whose Excel macro had been modified by a Möh-Pat.

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

He could tell the truth: three hours. He could tell a lie: one hour. Or he could tell the office truth: "It depends."

"It depends," he said solemnly. "If everyone stays calm, I can do it faster."

Users murmured, whispered, and hissed. "Staying calm" was a challenge that employees could rarely overcome – similar to "Please take a number" or "Please do not block the elevator."

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt raised her hand. "We expect results. Immediately."

Bartholomew nodded. Klöterling nodded. Even the Möh nodded, because he was trying to climb onto Bartholomew's chair and was rocking rhythmically to the beat.

The users turned around and left the office in an orderly panic. This meant: some stumbled, some whispered threats, and someone dropped a coffee cup.

As their footsteps faded away, Bartholomew exhaled. Deeply. Painfully.

Then he hesitantly sat down at his computer.

"Okay. We need to reset the system," he said quietly.

"We?" asked Klöterling.

A moo was now standing on Bartholomew's shoulder.

"Moo," he said.

Bartholomew nodded. "Yes. We do."

He typed in the first commands.

"First step: Reset password rules."

The terminal beeped:

"Conflict detected."

"Second step: Normalize user limits."

"Error. Administrator Möh_01 disagrees."

Bartholomew sighed. Of course. Of course Möh_01 would disagree, even though he wasn't even present. Or... perhaps he was present after all.

He slowly turned around.

And indeed. Möh_01 peeked out of the cable door and triumphantly lifted a cable like a sword.

"Moo."

Bartholomew ran his hand over his face.

"We need to negotiate."

Klötterling shouted: "NO!"

But it was too late. Because Möh_01 jumped onto the table, proud as a general.

"Moo. Moo."

"Yes," sighed Bartholomew. "I understand. You want co-determination rights."

Möh_01 nodded.

Bartholomew rested his elbows on the table.

"Okay. We'll negotiate."

Klötterling was appalled. The IT world was appalled. Probably even the network itself was appalled.

But the war without rules demanded unusual alliances.

And so began the unimaginable:

The first collective bargaining agreement between administrators and cable companies.

It is a widely acknowledged truth* that every serious negotiation eventually feels like a visit to the dentist: you know it's necessary, but you instinctively sense that something is about to hurt. The negotiations

between Bartholomäus and Möh_01 were no different – except that in this case, the dentist was small, fluffy, unpredictable, and highly interested in cables.

* At least among people who have ever tried to negotiate with beings who don't speak but still have strong opinions.

Bartholomew sat at the table, his hands folded, as serious as a diplomat in a crisis meeting. Next to him was Klöterling, who was so tense that he flinched at the slightest movement and glared angrily in the direction of Möh_01. Möh sat on a pile of old network logs like a monarch who has just discovered that he possesses a throne that happens to taste very good.

Meanwhile, Möh_02 and Möh_03 were milling around in the background, as if checking whether the room was safe enough to install new power structures.

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "So... agenda item one: password rules."

Möh_01 raised a small paw, held it in the air, and then formed it into an energetic gesture that looked like: "NO."

"Thirty-seven special characters are too many!" Bartholomew declared in a tone he usually reserved for printers who disagreed with him. "Users can't remember that."

The moo tilted its head. "Moo?"

"No, really," Bartholomew continued. "Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt almost threw a hole punch at me. And believe me: when that woman throws, she hits her target."

Klöterling nodded vigorously. "I saw it. That woman has precision. Military precision."

Möh_01 pondered. This was clearly visible because his ears tilted in one direction like antennas aligning themselves with cosmic signals. Then he displayed a new suggestion: he formed a number with his paws. Apparently a very small one.

Bartholomew thought for a moment. "You want... three signs?"

The moo nodded vigorously.

Klöterling turned pale. "D-three?! That's unsafe! That's dangerous! That's... that's password suicide!"

The moo hissed at him. A very quiet, but unmistakable "MOOH!" The message was clear: Klöterling was disqualified.

Bartholomew massaged his forehead. "We need to find a compromise." He thought for a moment. He thought for a while longer. He thought for so long that two Möhs started doing cartwheels on the server rack.

Then he said: "Eight characters. Special characters optional."

Möh_01 thought for a moment, felt for a cable, wrapped it around his stomach like a belt, and hummed a thoughtful "Möh..."

That was a good sign. A very good sign.

"So?" asked Bartholomew.

The moo raised its paw...hesitated...and nodded.

Bartholomew breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Good. That settles it then."

Klötterling scratched his head. "I can't believe we're currently negotiating safety rules with a... a carpet creature."

Bartholomew did not answer. For at that moment the next phase of the negotiation began.

Möh rolled a cable across the table and pointed at it.

"Moo."

Bartholomew understood immediately. "Ah. Network names."

Möh_02 and Möh_03 appeared like little advisors at their king's side. Möh_02 held a small piece of paper in his paws, on which he had scribbled with a pencil. Möh_03 pushed an empty cup in front of him, as if it were an official drinking vessel for state talks.

Bartholomew leaned forward. "So... you want to keep the Wi-Fi network 'MöhNetzwerk_01'?"

The Möhs said in unison: "MÖH."

Klötterling covered his face with his hands. "Bartholomäus! We can't call the Wi-Fi network MöhNetzwerk_01! Management will ask questions!"

"What kind of questions?" asked a curious voice.

Everyone turned around.

Mr. Grubenwald from management stood in the doorway. A man who looked as if he had successfully conquered the fashion of the seventies, but had never truly gotten over it. His jacket was gray, his face was gray, and presumably his personality was too.

"What's going on here...", he began slowly, as his eyes slid over the Möhs and they stared at him with open interest, "...?"

Bartholomew invented the first explanation that made some sense.

"Uh... team meeting. New agile model. With... uh... active network participation."

Grubenwald blinked four times. He clearly needed to process the information.

"Is that... modern?"

"Very," said Bartholomew.

"Innovative, even," said Klötterling, sounding pained.

The oldest moo in the room raised a paw and proudly said, "Moo!"

Grubenwald smiled and nodded. "Yes, I think so too."

He turned around and went back out, muttering: "I should look into that sometime... agile network management... aha... very modern..."

The door closed.

Bartholomew and Klöterling stood there silently. Then they both said at the same time:

"That was too close."

The moo patted the table to tidy it up.

Bartholomew cleared his throat. "Good. Point two: Wi-Fi name."

The moo pointed to a new sign he had made in the meantime. It read:

"MöhNetz_EliteProMax2000"

Bartholomew bit his lip. "I... don't know."

The bleat snorted and waved its arms excitedly.

Klöterling whispered: "That's the dumbest SSID I've ever seen."

Bartholomew whispered back, "It could be worse."

"How?"

Bartholomew pointed to the back of the shield. It read:

"MöhNetwork_AdminAccess_Activated"

Klöterling almost choked on his own tongue.

Bartholomew laid his hands flat on the table and breathed calmly, like someone consciously suppressing a panic attack.

"How about...," he began slowly, "...‘OfficeNet Secure’?"

The Möhs immediately said: "NO."

Bartholomew tried again.

"‘OfficeNet 2’?"

"NO."

"‘Don’t click_5G’?"

The Möhs considered it. It wasn't a rejection. Not yet a victory. But at least the possibility of an agreement.

Möh_01 finally grabbed the paper, scribbled something eagerly, showed it to Bartholomäus, and puffed out his chest.

The note read:

“MöhFi.”

Bartholomew blinked.

Klötterling whispered: “...Damn it. That’s good.”

Bartholomew nodded. "Okay. MöhFi."

The moo nodded royally.

Second victory. Second agreement.

The negotiations went alarmingly well. Or frighteningly well.

Bartholomew continued: "Point three: User login interval."

The Möhs pretended they hadn't heard this point.

“Point three,” Bartholomew repeated more sternly.

Möh_01 drummed his paws on the table.

"MÖH."

“No, no ‘moo’,” said Bartholomew. “Two minutes is unacceptable.”

The moo shook his head vigorously.

"Five minutes?" asked Bartholomew.

"NO."

"Ten minutes?"

The moo considered this. Then he made a small, uncertain noise.

"Moo...?"

Bartholomew smiled. "Ten?"

Möh_01 nodded.

That resolved the biggest conflict.

Bartholomäus was relieved. Klötterling rubbed his eyes in amazement. The Möhs cheered.

And the terminal reported:

"Admin rule updated: Login interval now 10 minutes."

Bartholomew sank back into his chair.

"Good," he said. "Good. We'll make progress."

But then Möh_01 suddenly raised both paws.

Bartholomew froze.

The Möhs still had one point.

One last one.

The Möh pointed at Bartholomew. Then at the system console. Then at the snapping-mouth bowl, which had been standing half-empty next to the monitor since yesterday.

"Moo."

Bartholomew frowned. "What... do you want?"

Möh repeated it more slowly. Even more clearly.

"Moo."

Bartholomew gasped for air.

"You want... an... official role?"

The moo nodded.

"In the system?"

Nod.

"In the network?"

Nod.

"In the company?"

Nodding. Three Möhs in unison.

"You want..."

He took a deep breath.

"...a separate user group?!"

The moo jumped into the air with excitement.

Bartholomew stared into space, while Klöterling whispered behind him:

“We mustn’t do that. We can’t do that. That will be... that will be our end.”

But Bartholomew, incredibly exhausted and already far beyond madness thanks to the day's events, said:

"We are negotiating."

And so the disaster began.

The Möhs didn't want just any role.

They wanted:

"Möh users – Level 1"

Access: Restricted

Rights: Cable management, noise control, break room

And Bartholomew knew:

This was no longer a war.

This was a contract.

An ancient, powerful, completely absurd pact between the administrator and fluffy basement creatures.

And when he finally clicked “Approved” with a trembling hand, a collective “MÖHHH!” could be heard throughout the basement, forever changing the fate of the entire company building.

Sometimes historic turning points arrive quietly. A gentle click. An inconspicuous keystroke. An unassuming "Approved" on a system window that no one had read completely. And in this case, it was exactly like that: a single click, barely audible, but with the effect of a magical thunderclap that reverberated through the building's foundations. Because on that day, something happened in the company's history that no ISO standard, no security policy, and no rationally conceived set of rules had ever foreseen: Möhs had acquired its own user group.

It wasn't a powerful group, not at all. Bartholomew had done everything in his power to limit their rights to the point where they couldn't format the coffee machine or turn the entire network into a single file called "MöhBackUp_final_finished_lastVersion2". But it was still an official user group. An entry in the system. An iconic Möh symbol next to a name that looked like a kid with peanut butter fingers had smashed the keyboard: "Möh-Group_01".

And that's how the real madness began.

The Möhs celebrated their victory with a ritual that later went down in IT history as "The Great Carpet Slide Storm." Möh_02 pulled a carpet back a bit in the hallway, Möh_03 slid onto it at full speed, and both landed in a cardboard box of screws, which exploded with a clatter. The Möhs laughed. Klöterling, on the other hand, fled the room with a look on his face that suggested he would henceforth regard all carpets with suspicion.

Bartholomew leaned back as the Möhs scurried through the corridors. One Möh balanced an empty Schnappmöse bowl on his head like a crown. Another had a cable draped around his neck like a scarf. And Möh_01 marched proudly ahead—a leader, a visionary, a being who had zero clue but acted with authority as if he did.

"We made a mistake," whispered Klöterling.

Bartholomew looked at him. "Why? I think that went well."

"Good?!" stammered Klöterling, pointing at the Möhs, who were trying to open the fire door. "They have rights now! Rights! In the system! Rights!"

Bartholomew thought for a moment. "Limited rights."

"That's like saying, 'The sharks are allowed in the swimming pool now, but only in the children's pool!'" Klöterling snapped. "That ALWAYS ends badly!"

But before Bartholomew could answer, a voice came from the hallway.

"BARTHOLOMAU!!!"

It was a scream that would have cracked window panes, had they not long since become milky from years of futile energy-saving coatings.

The users were back in the aisle.

All.

This time the group was even bigger. Reinforcements had arrived. For some reason, someone from the cafeteria was also there. Three people from HR, who looked like they didn't know why they were there. And Mr. Grubenwald wandered around the middle, looking irritated, muttering: "Agile... very agile... network... hmm..."

Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt stepped forward. She held her exasperated gaze like a sword. "Bartholomäus, we need to talk again."

"But... we are currently negotiating with—" Bartholomew began.

"No," she interrupted. "NOW."

Klöterling whispered: "That's it. They're going to lynch us."

Wummerling stepped forward, with an expression of pure administrative despair. "My Excel spreadsheet has disappeared again."

Bartholomew winced inwardly. This was dangerous. Wummerling was one of the few people who treated Excel files the way other people treat pets. A missing file was about as traumatic for him as losing a hamster.

"How... disappeared?" Bartholomew asked cautiously.

"A moo pulled them away!" shouted Wummerling, who now apparently entered a phase of pure panic. His USB stick trembled in his hand.

Everyone looked at the Möhs. The Möhs froze. Three dozen eyes. Completely innocent. Completely guilty.

A moo hid under a box. The box moved. All users stared at the box.

Bartholomew raised his hands. "Dear colleagues, please... calm down. There is an explanation."

"There is ALWAYS an explanation," said Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt, "but it is NEVER a good one."

"This time it's different," said Bartholomäus, stepping between User and Möhs. It was a move that required courage – not because of User, but because of Möhs, who may have decided to cooperate and engage in close-quarters diplomacy.

Bartholomew turned to the users. "We have resolved the password issues. We have negotiated the Wi-Fi names. We have... made peace."

"With WHOM?", Wummerling roared.

The moo on the desk raised a paw. "Moo."

Absolute silence followed. A silence in which you could have heard a paperclip drop – or, alternatively, a printer that suddenly decides to cough up toner.

"You... negotiate with mice?" the canteen employee asked, confused.

"Not mice," corrected Krawulinski, who had surprisingly calmed down. "Cable beings. Very important. Very rare. Some say they are the ghosts of old devices."

"I have NEVER heard of cable beings!" snapped Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt.

"That's because you don't work in IT," Klöterling explained with the calm of a man who had already mentally said goodbye. "IT knows about things... well... things."

The moo nodded in agreement. "Moo."

Bartholomew raised his hands. "Colleagues, please... I promise you: We have the situation under control."

At that moment there was a loud hiss. A spark jumped from the server rack. And a voice – an electronic, distorted, menacingly comical voice – came from the loudspeaker:

"NEW USER ADDED: Möh_Boss."

Everything froze. The users. The IT department. The Möhs.

Bartholomew was chalk-white. "What?!"

The Möh boss appeared in the doorway of the cable room.

He was bigger. Fluffier. His fur was slightly ruffled. He looked like the leader of a revolution or a carpet that had made a decision.

Wummerling dropped his USB stick.

"Oh God."

The Möh boss stepped forward.

And said in the deepest, most authoritarian "meh" voice:

"MÖHHHH."

The users scattered screaming like chickens in a sudden thunderstorm. Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt lost her composure. Grubenwald muttered something about an "agile coup d'état." And Wummerling ran. Just ran.

Only Bartholomew remained standing. And Klöterling, who hid behind him.

The Möh boss looked at Bartholomew. Then at the terminal. Then he raised a paw and tapped – just once.

The system reported:

"Administrator rights requested: Möh_Boss."

Bartholomew shouted: "NO!"

But by then it had already happened:

"Administrator rights granted."

The Möh boss grinned.

Not in the human sense. But in the universal sense. In the sense of a creature that has just discovered that power not only tastes good, but crackles deliciously.

Bartholomew fell to his knees.

"Ooooooh... damn."

The no-rules war had just reached its final phase.

And Bartholomew knew:

This time, snacks wouldn't help. This time, no snatchy offerings would save the peace.

Because this was no longer the Möh_01 war.

This was the Boss Moo War.

Bartholomew knelt on the floor while the Möh boss—a fluffy incarnation of anarchy—stood triumphantly before the terminal. Somewhere in the building, users screamed. Somewhere a door slammed. And somewhere, presumably, Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt shrieked that she would quit "if this digital madness doesn't end in two minutes!" But Bartholomew heard it all only faintly. His world, at that moment, was reduced to himself, the Boss Möh, and the terminal, which blinked dangerously red like a particularly bad sunset where someone had forgotten to adjust the color filter properly.

"Moo..." said the boss, Moo, in the calm, menacing manner of a seasoned dictator who knew words weren't necessary. The paw he raised said it all: He wanted full admin rights. Not restricted. Not moderated. Not diplomatically negotiated. But ALL-ENCOMPASSING. Godlike. The kind of rights usually reserved for server manufacturers, hackers, and very tired administrators just before midnight.

Bartholomew slowly got to his feet, which wasn't easy with a nervously chewing baby clinging to his trouser leg. He was pale. He was tired. And he was ready to fight for the network—because it was his network. His

empire. His digital home. Sure, sometimes he wanted to throw it against the wall. But that was different; every administrator did that. Love manifested itself in different ways.

"Listen," Bartholomew began, trying to keep his voice calm even though a chorus of panic was sung "Aaaaaaah!" inside him. "I can't... uh... I'm not allowed to... well... legally... uh... the company... no, just no. You're not getting full admin rights."

Möh_Boss stared at him. Unmoved. Incomprehensibly. Unstoppably. Then he took a step forward – and typed again on the keyboard.

"Admin rights for Möh_Boss confirmed."

"WHAT?!" roared Klöterling, who until then had been hidden behind the desk and now shot up like a nervous garden gnome startled by a robotic lawnmower. "How did he do that?!"

Bartholomew stared at the console. And saw it. A single, inconspicuous field: "Automatically approve admin request." Behind it, the text: "Activated by: Möh_01".

"Oh no," whispered Bartholomew. "Little Möh has betrayed us."

The boss grumbled contentedly now, for he knew he had won. A king who had been presented with the crown jewels. An administrator who didn't even know what a Windows registry entry was, but could now theoretically delete them all.

"We... we must limit the power," stammered Klöterling. "We need... uh... a firewall against Möhs!"

Bartholomew pondered this. A firewall against Möhs. A Möhs wall. Sounded good. But would it work? Would they even notice it? Probably not. They'd slip through. Or climb over it. Or eat it.

"We need to talk," said Bartholomew, stepping in front of the boss. "You have the power now. But with great power comes..."

The Möh boss waited. "...uh... great responsibility?" Bartholomew himself didn't know if the Möhs understood this iconic phrase. But perhaps the Möh did understand the concept of responsibility? Perhaps he understood the implications? Perhaps he was a wise, gentle leader?

The boss shoved a cable into his mouth and began to chew.

"No, of course not," murmured Bartholomew.

As the boss turned back to the terminal, a sound suddenly came from the hallway – a sound so unique, so familiar, that Bartholomew instantly understood everything.

A voice called out: "Are there any more Schnappmöse here?"

The entire cellar froze.

The users came back. Not all of them. Only the brave ones. Those who were hungry.

It was Mr. Wuschling from logistics who, yesterday at the large chocolate lake, had learned how delicious the catch of snapping morsels had been. He looked around the room, saw the morsels – and automatically held up a plate on which lay three last specimens, which Bartholomew had originally set aside for himself.

The Möhs saw the plate. They saw Bartholomew. Then the plate again. The boss Möh looked up like a monarch receiving a divine revelation.

Snap pussies. The primal substance. The essence. The taste of endless decisions.

Bartholomew recognized the opportunity. "Listen," he said, stepping slowly between the plate and the boss, "we can... trade."

The boss mooed with a deep, venerable "MOOH". This sounded like: I am willing to negotiate admin rights if the tribute is right.

Bartholomew pointed at the plate. "If you – as the grand administrator of your kind – leave the password rules, the WLAN structure and all user logins alone... you'll get this."

The boss sniffed. "Moo." That sounded like: Prove it.

Bartholomew took the plate. He lifted it. The Möhs stretched. It was almost a sacred scene.

"THESE," said Bartholomew with the authority of a man who fears he will otherwise be eaten, "belong to you."

The boss moo raised a paw. Trader's position. Ruler's position. He tapped the terminal one last time.

The system reported:

"Administrator rights Möh_Boss downgraded to 'observer'."

"Network: Stable."

"Password rules: Human."

"Login: 10 minutes."

Bartholomäus sighed. The users collectively breathed a sigh of relief. Klöterling almost collapsed.

Bartholomew handed over the plate. The Möh boss ceremoniously accepted it and immediately began to eat. The other Möhs rushed in. A collective "MÖHHHH!" filled the room as the Schnappmöse were devoured like diplomatic sweets after a deal was signed.

It was done. The war was over.

Krawulinski appeared out of nowhere and said, "What did I miss?" Bartholomew simply replied, "Everything. Absolutely everything."

As the Möhs, full and content, crept back into the cable room, a strange calm settled over the IT department. Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt appeared in the doorway and said, "Is everything working again?" "Yes," said Bartholomäus, exhausted. "Good," she said. "Then I'll complain later."

And she left.

Bartholomew sat down. Klöterling sat down. Both stared into space.

Klöterling whispered: "We are still alive."

Bartholomew nodded. "Yes."

"And the company is still running."

"Yes."

"And the Möhs...?"

A moo peeked out from behind the door and made a satisfied "moo".

Bartholomew closed his eyes. "That's just how it is now... like this."

The bastard administrator is born.

Bartholomew sat at his desk, his hands clasped, his eyes half-closed, his face half in reality, half in digital oblivion. His colleagues took it for fatigue. An obvious mistake. But in truth, something was happening that is extremely rare in the IT world: a transformation. A change. The kind of inner jolt some people experience when they suddenly realize they actually possess power. Not physical power, not political power, but the only power that truly matters in the office: power over user accounts.

The Möhs had disappeared back into the cable ducts, leaving behind an atmosphere best described as "post-fluffy chaos." The network was working again. The users had stopped sending threatening emails. Wummerling's Excel file had reappeared (albeit under the filename "Möh_backup_notreally_final," but still). And Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt had merely given Bartholomäus a sharp look, as if offering to forgive him everything if he would solve her printer problems. So, all in all, things had almost calmed down.

But Bartholomew sensed something stirring within him. Deep. Dark. Bigger than the root of a printer jam. It was a feeling, warm and powerful, dangerous and somehow... delicious. Perhaps like a power outage feels to someone who's just walked out of a particularly unpleasant Teams meeting. It was a mixture of triumph and irresponsibility. A feeling that formed the sentence: I could rearrange everything in here. Everything. And nobody could stop me.

Klötterling immediately noticed that something was wrong with Bartholomäus. His eyes took on that gleam. That gleam that IT professionals get when they realize they could not only solve a problem, but solve it far more efficiently, if the user simply disappeared. Not literally, of course—although, well... a little literally, perhaps.

"Are you alright?" Klötterling asked cautiously, as if he were trying to calm a ticking time bomb by offering her a cup of tea.

Bartholomew opened his eyes slowly. Too slowly. Like someone who's just realized for the first time that they can see through walls, but would rather not admit it yet.

"I am..." Bartholomew began, feeling the words bubbling inside him, "...surprisingly well."

Klötterling raised his eyebrows. Something about that sentence was wrong. Especially the fact that Bartholomew was saying it. Bartholomew usually spoke as if he had daily arguments with printers who hissed their sour opinions at him.

At that moment, Bartholomew's screen vibrated slightly. It wasn't a typical vibration. Not a standard Windows shake. It was the vibration of a system whispering: You're different now. I can feel it. The two of us could do great things.

Bartholomew carefully reached out and touched the mouse. And the mouse obeyed him with a gentleness that was completely unnatural. It obeyed him as if it had suddenly understood that he was someone best left unopposed.

He opened the user management. The list appeared. And for the first time, it spoke to him.

Not loudly. Not in words.

But she spoke.

Every username. Every profile. Every setting.

He lined up in front of him as if the system were saying:
Choose me. Edit me. Delete me if you want.

A blissful smile spread across Bartholomew's face.

And that was the moment when Klöterling realized:
Oh no. He's got it. He's got the look. The administrator look.

The "administrator's gaze" was legendary in the IT department. It wasn't an ordinary gaze. It only appeared when someone crossed a threshold. An invisible line, beyond which lay a realm of power. A boundary that normally no one was supposed to cross—unless they wanted to become a bastard administrator.

A bastard administrator was a special kind of administrator. One who was no longer intimidated by users. One who wasn't afraid of Krawulinski. One who didn't study the rules, but reinvented them. One who didn't apologize when he revoked someone's access rights. No.

A bastard administrator declared: "You had too many rights anyway."

Bartholomew felt his heart begin to pound, not with fear, but with anticipation. He scrolled through the profiles. He saw things he had never seen before. Settings that had previously been grayed out now shone enticingly bright.

"Tell me..." whispered Klöterling, "why are you grinning like that?"

"I... grin?"

"Yes! That grin! That... that admin grin!"

Bartholomew touched his own face. And there it was. A grin. A broad one. A dangerous one. The kind you usually only see after three energy drinks and four successful printer restarts.

"I feel..." Bartholomew said slowly, "...as if I could finally... fix everything."

"Repair it?" Klöterling asked skeptically.

Bartholomew's voice deepened. Almost solemn.

"No. Improve."

At that moment, the air crackled behind them. A soft "meow" sounded from the cable duct. A "meow" peeked out and looked at Bartholomew with a mixture of concern and appreciation. As if it were thinking: It may not eat cables, but... it's one of us.

Bartholomew felt something within him finally come to a head at that sound.

A spark jumped. A spark between man and machine. Power flowed.

In the distance, somewhere three floors above, a user shouted indignantly: "WHY ISN'T MY SCANNER WORKING?!"

Bartholomew stood up. Slowly. With his head held high. With that dangerous, holy grin on his face.

"I am leaving," he said solemnly, "to educate the users."

Klötterling slid back in his chair. "Oh. Oh NO. You're one of them now. A... a..."

Bartholomew stopped. The sun shone through the window. His shadow seemed larger than usual.

"I am," he said with a calmness more frightening than any outburst, "an administrator."

The moo behind him added reverently: "Moo."

And with that, it was official.

The bastard administrator was born.

The birth of a bastard administrator is not a sudden event in the IT world. It's not a flash of lightning, a ray of sunshine, or epic background music. It's more like a quiet but clearly audible click—the deliberate click of a person activating a checkbox they would never have touched before. A checkbox like, for example, "Users are NOT allowed to reset their own passwords." And it was precisely this click that echoed in the digital depths of the system as Bartholomew, with his newfound power, sat enthroned behind his screen.

Klötterling, who by nature possessed the fear of a small, easily irritated forest animal, observed him with a mixture of horror and fascination. He knew that Bartholomew had changed, at least since he had caused an error message to correct itself voluntarily and apologize with a single glance. Error messages didn't usually do that. In fact, error messages never did. But here was a man who reigned over IT with the authority of a digitally enlightened high priest.

"Tell me, Bartholomew," whispered Klötterling, as he saw Bartholomew run a finger over the user list, "you... uh... scare me a little."

"Afraid?" Bartholomew asked gently, which only made the situation worse. An administrator who spoke softly was always more dangerous than one who shouted.

"Yes. That... grin. That... one-eyebrow-raising thing. And especially the way you're navigating between user rights right now. You seem..."

"Professional?" Bartholomew asked hopefully.

"No. Unstoppable," said Klötterling.

Bartholomew smiled. "That's good."

He scrolled on, each scroll sounding like an ancient wheel of fate. A catalyst for chaos. A digital prophecy. Halfway through, he stopped and looked at a user profile.

"Blümel," he murmured.

Klöterling flinched. "What... what about Blümel?"

Bartholomäus opened Blümel's settings. The system didn't even ask for confirmation anymore. It knew who he was. It knew he wasn't someone who would accept "Are you sure?"

"Blümel has had the same password for six years," Bartholomäus noted.

"Yes... but... he always does that. He says he only remembers that one thing."

"It's 'bluemel1234'," Bartholomew continued.

Klöterling tensed up. "We both know that this isn't safe."

"It's an insult," Bartholomew corrected.

With a focused gaze, he typed in a new password. A long one. A very long one. A password so complex that even the keyboard briefly considered whether it wanted to process it at all.

"Bartholomäus... please...", pleaded Klöterling.

"Password changed," Bartholomew said with satisfaction.

"What did you take?"

Bartholomew smiled dangerously. "The password is now a line from an old poem that someone once scribbled on the back of an IT manual. In Old Latin. Backwards."

Klöterling swallowed hard. "Blümel is going to kill us."

"Blümel will survive it. Maybe. It strengthens his character."

He clicked on.

"Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt..." he murmured. "Aha. She has 432 files on her desktop. They're all named 'New 1' to 'New 432'."

Klöterling slumped into his chair. "Don't do it."

Bartholomew did it.

He created a folder named "Chaos. Please do not open it." And moved all 432 files into it.

The system rattled. It wheezed. It protested. And then it did what it had to.

Klöterling watched him with his mouth open. "You... you've gone crazy."

"No. Freed," said Bartholomew, and his voice sounded so calm that Klöterling knew that things were really bad now.

He opened Ms. Habersack's profile. "She has local administrator rights. Why?"

"Because she wanted to install graphics software last year," Klöterling recalled. "And then... the rights were forgotten."

"Forgotten?" asked Bartholomew.

"Well... yes."

"No longer."

One click. The world became a little safer. At least for IT. Not for Habersack, who would be very surprised tomorrow.

Bartholomew scrolled on.

"Ah. The boss."

Klöterling pushed his chair back in a panic. "NO! LEAVE THE BOSS ALONE! EVERYTHING CAN STAY AS IT IS!"

"He ignored 147 unread warning messages," Bartholomew noted. "And he clicks on everything that flashes."

"He's the boss!"

Bartholomew smiled. "Not anymore... in my network."

He disabled the "Automatically open suspicious files" function. He revoked his administrator rights. He placed a document called "Please do not delete" on his desktop, which was actually a PDF titled "How to use your PC without us all dying."

"Why are you doing that?" Klöterling asked quietly.

Bartholomew leaned back.

"Because it has to be done. Because order must be created in this chaos. Because I have the power. And because they've all been doing things for years that no IT professional should have to do."

The screen in front of him glowed warmly. A hint of system activity. An acknowledgment. A kind of digital pat on the back.

And then... something appeared.

A message. Short. Simple.

"MÖH?"

Bartholomew glanced at the cable duct. A Möh peered out. He had an administrator's look. A fluffy one. A connection had been made. An alliance. A digital understanding.

"Yes," said Bartholomew seriously, "I feel it too."

The moo nodded. "Moo."

Klötterling stared at her in disbelief. "You... have a pact!"

"No. Respect," said Bartholomew. "The Möhs know what real power is."

He opened another window. "Now I'm going to correct the printers."

"NO!!!" Klötterling screamed in panic.

But it was too late. Bartholomew clicked. And the printer on the second floor emitted a quiet, subservient "ping".

The bastard administrator was working now.

Unstoppable.

Relentless.

Inevitably.

And the network... obeyed.

The building vibrated. Not in the physical sense, but in the metaphysical sense. In the sense of a company sensing a shift in power. One of those shifts where the ground doesn't shake, but the coffee cups in the break room clink suspiciously softly. In the sense of a universe whispering: Something terrible, wonderful, unstoppable has just happened.

Bartholomew stood up. He was tall, but now he seemed taller. He was an IT professional, but now he seemed like an administrator who had found his calling. A person who suddenly knew that cables behind the wall weren't just cables, but his allies. A person who had realized that user rights weren't rules, but tools. And tools could be wielded. Or thrown. Or, in very rare cases, used as a diplomatic weapon.

Klötterling slowly pushed his chair away, like someone trying to escape a lion in a library without making a sound.

"You look... different," he said tentatively.

"Like someone who wants to create world peace," Bartholomew replied calmly.

"That's not the view of someone who wants to create world peace," Klötterling countered, "that's the view of someone who deactivates three user accounts at once."

Bartholomew smiled. "World peace begins with a well-organized network."

He took a few steps. Each step was so purposeful that the network itself seemed to pause. A thin fiber optic cable in the wall twitched reverently. A network card spontaneously switched to power-saving mode, unsure what else to do.

The first victims of his newfound, almost divine willpower were the printers. Of course, the printers. Printers are the first to rebel. Printers are the last to obey. And printers are the only devices that can simultaneously devour paper and evaporate common sense.

Bartholomew approached the printer in the hallway like a priest approaching an altar. An altar that had demanded sacrifices for years. Sacrifices of toner, sweat, and tears.

The printer squeaked. Honestly. Printers don't usually squeak. But this one knew something was different. It sensed the power.

“Printer 2B,” Bartholomew said slowly, “we’re talking now.”

Klötterling stood at the end of the corridor, already mentally signing his will.

The printer let out a short, offended "krrk". It had a paper jam. Of course it had a paper jam. It always had paper jams.

“I know what you’re doing,” Bartholomew said calmly. “And I know why.”

The printer beeped. The beeping sounded like: What do you want? I'm working! I'm doing my best!

Bartholomew pulled out the paper tray without blinking. A single sheet of paper appeared. It was wedged in so incredibly tightly that it looked as if it had decided to take a sabbatical and never return.

“This leaf here,” said Bartholomew, “was not uptight.”

The printer beeped again. This time the beeping sounded like a lie.

"This sheet was deliberately pulled in by you," Bartholomew stated. "So you could have some peace and quiet. So you could finish work for the day. Because you, dear printer... are lazy."

The printer emitted a screeching sound. Perhaps a protest. Perhaps a scream. Perhaps an attempt to force sympathy.

Bartholomew put the leaf back. Neatly. Straight. Respectfully.

Then he looked at the printer and said in a calm, unwavering voice:

"Not today."

The printer vibrated. Once. Then it emitted a soft "beep". A punishable, but resigned beep.

“Good,” said Bartholomew. “We understand each other.”

He closed the lid. The printer made a noise that sounded suspiciously like surrender.

Klötterling stared.

“He... obeyed...” he stammered.

“Of course,” said Bartholomew. “The devices know when an administrator has evolved.”

He turned away from the printer.

At that moment, a pattering sound was heard behind him.

A moo came out of the ventilation shaft. The same moo as before. A moo with conviction and the kind of self-confidence that only beings who play with an electrical cable and don't die have.

“Moo,” said the moo, looking at Bartholomew admiringly.

Bartholomew nodded.

"I know."

The moo sat down. An official sign of recognition. Moos only sit down to show respect. Or when they're hungry. It was probably both.

An employee – Mr. Brösel, the intern – came down the corridor.

He saw Bartholomew, saw the Möh, saw the printer, immediately turned around again and went in the opposite direction.

"He saw us!" whispered Klöterling in a panic.

"He saw me," Bartholomew corrected calmly. "He will remain silent."

"Why?!"

Bartholomew looked in the direction in which Mr. Brösel had fled.

"Because he saw the look. The look that says, 'I can put all your files in a ZIP if you annoy me.' And he wants to live."

Klöterling remained silent. It was difficult to disagree.

Then something unexpected happened. Something Klöterling hadn't thought possible. Something that would change the IT department forever.

The main network monitor was flickering. Not in a faulty-power-plug-is-loose sense.

But... respectfully.

A text appeared on the screen.

"ADMINISTRATOR LEVEL INCREASED."

Klöterling gasped. "That... that can't be! That doesn't exist! That's not even a function!"

"No," said Bartholomew. "But some things happen when IT recognizes what is needed."

Another window appeared.

"NEW ABILITY UNLOCKED: Drive users insane (passively)."

Klöterling stumbled backwards. "PASSIVE?!"

"Interesting," murmured Bartholomew.

The window disappeared. He suddenly felt lighter. Faster. More powerful.

At the same moment, three Möhs appeared – the Boss-Möh, Möh_01 and a very roundish specimen that had probably found too many Schnappmöse over the weekend.

They lined up in a row.

The boss moo raised a paw. Slowly. Solemnly.

Bartholomew also raised a hand. It was a silent ceremony. An initiation. An alliance between two worlds: IT and the wiring world.

“MOHHHH,” said the boss-moo.

Klötterling unconsciously fell to his knees.

Bartholomew said softly:

"It begins."

And at that moment, somewhere on the third floor, a user shouted:

"WHY DID MY PASSWORD CHANGE BY ITSSELF?!"

Bartholomew smiled.

The bastard administrator was not only born.

He had arrived.

Bartholomew was still standing in the hallway, as if he'd put down roots, but these weren't ordinary roots—roots of pure IT power. Invisible administrator tendrils that wound their way through the systems, making him feel as if every USB port belonged to him and every file knew his name. He'd always suspected that a secret whisper existed behind the blinking LEDs of the switches. But now he heard it clearly.

And the whisper said: Finally, someone is cleaning up.

Klötterling, however, was unsure whether he also heard the whispering or whether it was a sound of his own panic. For him, panic was a very active, talkative feeling that liked to make noise, as if it were a badly behaved alarm.

“Bartholomäus, please, we need to talk,” said Klötterling, who was now trying to speak slowly and frantically at the same time, which gave him a strange twitch in his left eyebrow.

“We are already talking,” Bartholomew replied calmly.

“No, I mean... we need to talk about this.” Klötterling made a sweeping gesture that actually meant “everything.” “About the look, the sound, the monitor that’s doing things it shouldn’t! And about the Möhs! The Möhs have... adopted you!”

The three Moo-monsters were indeed sitting around Bartholomew as if he were a cross between a king, a shaman-priest, and a snack dispenser. The boss Moo-monster squatted majestically at his feet, arranging his tail to make it look especially fluffy. Moo-monster_01 was chewing on a piece of cable that definitely came from a server. And the round Moo-monster had wrapped himself around Bartholomew's shoe like a rug and was purring. Moo-monsters could purr when they felt safe. This was a bad sign.

“I have an alliance with them,” Bartholomew said calmly.

"An ALLIANCE?!" Klöterling clung to the wall. "With cable creatures? With... with small, furry system glitches?"

"They are not system errors," Bartholomew corrected sternly. "They are... employees."

The boss moo raised a paw and nodded in approval. Moos welcomed the term "employee" because it made them feel like an official part of the operation. They knew they weren't paid, but moos were easily satisfied. A snapping toy here, a USB cable there—and they were happy.

"Moo," confirmed the boss-moo solemnly.

Klöterling sank to his knees. "This can't be true."

But it was true. And it became even truer.

Suddenly, as if the universe itself wanted to lend its support to the whole spectacle, the ceiling lights began to flicker. Not frantically, like a power outage, but rhythmically. Evenly. Coordinatedly. As if the light itself had decided to create an atmospheric mood.

"Oh no," murmured Klöterling. "Now it's becoming ritualistic."

Bartholomew stood still. He felt stronger. Not physically, but digitally. As if the building were granting him access to something. Something big. Something powerful. An ability reserved only for the select few who had crossed the threshold to become the Bastard Administrator.

A flicker. A hum. A deep, vibrating sound from the main server.

A window appeared on the hallway monitor.

"NEW FEATURE ACTIVATED: Remote control of user behavior."

Klöterling screamed. Loudly. Terrified. Hysterically.

"That's not legal!" he shouted. "That's not moral! That's not even... not even technically allowed!"

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "Now."

Möh_01 jumped onto Bartholomew's shoulder and said: "Möh", which meant something like: It was long overdue.

Bartholomew raised his hand. The system recognized the gesture. Another window opened.

"User influence level: Adjustable."

Klöterling howled. The boss-Möh looked satisfied. And Bartholomäus felt for the first time in his life that he was not just an administrator.

He was the administrator.

At that same moment, three floors above him, a chain reaction of events began.

Mr. Brösel, the intern, opened a file called "Please click". He clicked.

A warning message appeared. He clicked again. The warning message appeared again, but this time it said:

"Please do not click."

He clicked. And immediately his screen went into sleep mode, while his PC moved the mouse — all by itself — and typed a message:

"Don't worry. Bartholomew will take care of it."

Brösel almost fell off his chair.

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt also felt the effects. Her mouse began to refuse to move to the left. On the left was her cluttered desktop. On the right was the newly created folder "Chaos. Please do not open."

The mouse only wanted to go right. Always right. Perhaps not politically ideal, but technically very sensible.

"What the...?!" she exclaimed, while the mouse simply ignored her movements.

The network responded:

"Order is important."

And Wummerling, who had been a bundle of nerves since the Möh incident, opened Excel, only to find that his spreadsheet was organizing itself. Columns were rearranging themselves. Formulas were correcting themselves. A note appeared:

"You're welcome. – Your administrator"

He cried.

Back in the hallway, Bartholomew stood like a conductor orchestrating the entire orchestra. And the IT played. It played heavenly. Or hellishly. Depends on your perspective.

Klötterling crawled on all fours.

"Please, Bartholomew... please tell me that you are still... you."

Bartholomew placed his hand reassuringly on his shoulder.

"I am who I am," he said calmly. "Just more... efficient."

"More efficient?!"

"Yes. More effective. More targeted. And..."

He looked towards the main server.

"...ready."

The boss moo jumped onto Bartholomew's arm. His eyes sparkled.

Together they looked at the network.

An administrator. And the Möhs, his digital shamans.

“Meh,” said the boss-meh.

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “The next step begins.”

And somewhere in the upper floors, the users felt goosebumps, without knowing why.

There are moments in an administrator's life that feel like the transition from a simple village magician to an arch-warrior. The moment when you no longer just repair, but direct. No longer just react, but shape. A moment that makes you feel as if keyboards have suddenly developed respect, monitors humility, and servers a kind of primitive religiosity.

Bartholomew had now reached that moment.

He stood in the middle of the hallway, the Möhs family surrounding him like a small, furry bodyguard. The large network display flickered in front of him, and there was something ceremonial about the flickering. It wasn't the flicker of an overloaded system or a faulty power supply. It was the flicker of a stage adjusting its spotlights because a star had entered the room.

Klötterling, who was now very pale and very sweaty, pressed himself against the wall as if he wanted to become one with it. He knew what was coming. He knew this was the moment when administrators either became heroes... or something else. Something darker. Something bastard.

Bartholomew raised his hand. A window opened automatically.

"Access rights - advanced options"

An option that had previously existed only to perpetuate old IT myths, not to be actually used. But now that Bartholomew had reached this new level, it stood open like the door to a mysterious back room where old system ghosts smoke and recount their greatest blunders.

He clicked.

The window expanded.

New menu items have appeared.

Klötterling gasped for air.

“These... these are functions that don't even exist!” he exclaimed. “It... this is... this is forbidden IT magic! This is—”

Bartholomew placed two fingers on his shoulder. A gentle, but absolutely final gesture.

"IT decides what exists," he said calmly. "Not the documentation."

A deep hum filled the air. The hum rose from the floor, vibrated through the walls, and penetrated the cables. It sounded like electricity with a mind of its own.

And then the next window appeared.

"NEW ADMIN SKILL UNLOCKED: Modulate user behavior (global)"

Klötterling ran off. Not fast, more like an ugly, relaxed jog, but far enough to feel safe. At least, that's what he thought.

Bartholomew took a deep breath. A Moo on his shoulder slumped down, relaxed, as if sensing the growing power like a comforting electric blanket. The boss Moo stood beside Bartholomew and raised its paw. A ritual had begun, and anyone with enough IT experience knew: once a ritual has begun, it's too late to run away.

Bartholomew looked at the menu. It offered new options that sounded roughly like a mixture of "administrator god" and "educational disaster":

– Reduce user panic – Reinforce user logic – Hide unnecessary questions – Prevent illogical user actions – Gently but sustainably steer users towards "best practices" – Minimize chaos caused by groupthink – Ignore coffee machine malfunctions

Bartholomew frowned.

"The last one is new," he murmured.

The boss, Möh, said "Möh" and nodded in agreement. Apparently, the Möhs had extensive experience with coffee machine malfunctions. Which made sense, since they seemed to have developed a certain enthusiasm for confusing appliances.

Bartholomew experimentally clicked on the first point.

"Reduce user panic"

A window appeared:

"Apply globally?"

Klötterling's voice echoed from the background: "NO! DON'T DO IT! PANIC IS OUR NATURAL USER RESOURCE!"

But it was too late. Bartholomew clicked "Yes".

A gentle digital breeze swept through the building. No music was playing. But you could feel an atmosphere.

And upstairs, on the third floor:

Ms. Pimplinger-Schmidt, who had just been about to scream, "WHY WON'T THIS DAMN EMAIL GO OUT?!"... remained silent. Instead, she frowned. She took a deep breath. An even deeper one. And said, "Maybe try closing and reopening it?"

Wummerling, who had been about to jump out of the window with his Excel spreadsheet, stopped. He looked at his spreadsheet. It looked friendly. He sat down again.

Mr. Brösel, the intern, looked at an error message, nodded seriously and murmured: "I understand."

At the very top, in the conference room, three employees said simultaneously: "Oh well, it's not so bad."

Klötterling saw all of this on the control monitor.

He clutched his chest. "Oh God." He gasped for air. "Oh God!" He sank to his knees. "You have calmed her!"

Bartholomew nodded.

"Yes."

"YOU CAN'T DO THAT! HUMANS ARE NOT MADE FOR QUIET! ESPECIALLY NOT IN THE OFFICE!"

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "Humans can learn it."

The boss moo raised his paw. Confirmation.
A blessing. A fluffy amen.

Bartholomew clicked on.

"Enhance user logic"

A window appeared:

"Warning: This feature may have unexpected effects."

Bartholomew smiled. "That's what they always say."

He clicked.

A strange change began throughout the entire office. Not visible, but noticeable.

Outside, someone was heard saying: "I don't think the problem lies with the IT at all."

Klötterling made a noise as if he were exploding from the inside.

"NO! PLEASE NO! THAT WAS OUR ONLY CONSTANT!"

Another voice said: "I should probably sort my files."

A third voice said: "I think it's due to my own user error."

Klötterling sank to the ground like a wet towel.

"THIS IS AGAINST NATURE!"

Bartholomew let go of the mouse. He breathed a sigh of satisfaction. A sense of peace spread across his face.

"It is finished."

The boss-Möh jumped onto his desk and made a celebratory "MÖHHHH" that vibrated through the infrastructure.

The network flickered one last time. And then a message appeared that surprised even Bartholomew.

"ADMIN LEVEL MAXIMIZED."
"STATUS: BASTARD ADMINISTRATOR."

The screen glowed with bright light. So bright, in fact, that Klöterling covered his face. Bartholomew, however, looked directly into it.

He was no longer just an administrator.

He was the administrator.

And throughout the entire building, one could hear all the printers suddenly emit a polite, respectful beep at the same time.

The chapter was complete.

The bastard administrator had fully awakened.

Passive-aggressive updates and active sabotage

In every company, every government office, and every universe of paperwork, there's at least one person who acts like a walking, gray printer error. Not loud. Not conspicuous. But always there. Quiet, but tiresome. Passive-aggressive, but without realizing it. A person whose mere presence raises the blood pressure of the entire staff by a measurable amount.

In the local administrative building, this person was Mr. Fieselmann.

Mr. Fieselmann was the kind of colleague who would simply walk into the office in the morning as if he were a ghost doing some tidying up. No greeting. No nod. No "Moin" (a common greeting in Northern Germany). Not even a "Urgh." He glided through the corridors like a fog spreading bad moods. A fog with a receding hairline, downturned mouth, and a facial expression that always said, "I've forgotten why I'm alive again, but I'm doing my best to ruin the mood for everyone else, too."

If Bartholomew looked 20 years younger, then Mr. Fieselmann looked 20 years older. And if Bartholomew was in the process of perfecting the digital order, then Mr. Fieselmann was in the process of... destroying it. Not intentionally. Not openly.

No.

Passive-aggressive.

The most dangerous form of sabotage.

That morning, Bartholomew was in top form. He was the newly awakened bastard administrator. He had the Möhs' support. The network felt his presence. And the users were suddenly calmer, more diligent, and surprisingly reasonable—an effect that would presumably revolutionize medical research once someone explained it.

But something was brewing beneath the surface.

Mr. Fieselmann was quieter than usual.

Very quiet.

So still that even a Möh paused briefly and sniffed the air, testing its senses. Möhs could smell sabotage. They were, so to speak, the Wi-Fi signals of the soul.

Möh_01 climbed up Bartholomäus' table leg, sat on his lap and said:

"Moo."

That wasn't a normal "moo". That was a warning moo.

Bartholomew frowned. "What's wrong?"

Möh_01 nudged his paw against the monitor.

Suddenly, a file appeared on the screen – without a window, without a message, without a login – which did not belong there.

“SystemUpdate_but_actually_not.exe”

Bartholomew's eyes narrowed.

An update that wasn't one.

A file that pretended to be important, even though it reeked of trouble.

A file that behaved in exactly the same way as Mr. Fieselmann.

Klötterling came into the room at exactly the wrong moment, saw the file, shouted briefly and grabbed his chest.

"BARTHOLOMUA! THIS! IS! A! SABOTAG UPDATE!"

Bartholomew nodded darkly. "I know."

"There could only have been one person!"

As if on cue, Mr. Fieselmann glided past the open door frame.

He didn't greet me. Of course not. He didn't say anything either.

He just glanced at Bartholomew. Very briefly. A look like, "I know that you know that I know that you know everything."

And then he left.

Just like that.

Without a sound. Without a breath. Without something that people occasionally do: exist, but at least politely.

Klötterling whispered: "He... didn't even say good morning."

“He never says good morning,” replied Bartholomew.

“Yes... but today it was NOTHING LIKELY.”

Bartholomew stood up. The Möhs also straightened up like tiny soldiers.

"Then it's serious," he said.

He opened the suspicious file in an isolated environment. A sandbox. A safe zone. A digital quarantine box for things that were potentially worse than a printer screaming "paper jam" when there's no paper in it.

The contents of the file were... unusual.

It was a script. A poorly written script. An awkwardly twisted script. A script that looked like it had been created by someone who knew how to turn on their own PC, but not why it crashed.

And above the script it said:

REM This is an important update

REM Do not delete

REM Otherwise everything will break

R.E.M. Honestly now

Bartholomew stared at it.

“This is...”, Klöterling began.

“...the worst lie of all time,” Bartholomew finished the sentence.

The script attempted, among other things:

- to replace the global printer driver with a version that only works on Mr. Fieselmann's personal device
- replacing all system background images with a photo of his closet – renaming all Start menu entries to "Don't open this" – setting the time forward by two hours because he supposedly "doesn't accept time zones"
- replacing the login screen with a picture of himself looking neutral (which looked worse than any blue screen)

Klöterling held his hands in front of his mouth. “Bartholomäus... that is... that is...”

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “Active sabotage.”

The Möhs snarled. They couldn't stand it when systems were manipulated. They themselves manipulated systems regularly, but they did it honestly. Out of instinct. Out of hunger. Not out of malice.

The boss stepped forward. He sniffed at the script. He shook himself.

“Moo.” A long, indignant moo.

This meant: This person must be stopped.

Bartholomew knew what he had to do. "Fieselmann broke the rules."

"Which rules?" asked Klöterling.

"The most important rule," Bartholomew said in a cold voice. "The sacred rule of all IT."

He raised his finger, and the Möhs craned their heads expectantly.

"Don't make the system worse than it is."

A moo applauded. Or scratched itself. Hard to say.

Bartholomew took a deep breath. Then he opened the administrator console.

"What are you doing?" asked Klöterling.

Bartholomew smiled. "I will..."

The Möhs held their breath. Klöterling trembled.

Bartholomew finished the sentence:

"...educate."

Klöterling exclaimed: "OH NO! THAT'S WORSE THAN PUNISHMENT!"

And that was exactly it.

The bastard administrator had awakened.

Mr. Fieselmann would feel it immediately.

For Bartholomew began – with a raised eyebrow grin – to restructure the system.

Not to protect it.

But to show Fieselmann that a bastard administrator always makes the last move.

They say a good administrator is like a surgeon: calm, precise, and with a toolbox full of instruments no one else would even want to look at. A bastard administrator, on the other hand, is like a surgeon who has decided it's perfectly legitimate to teach the patient how to live a healthy lifestyle on the side—while simultaneously removing the wrong organs to educate him.

Bartholomew was clearly the latter.

And his first "patient" was none other than Mr. Fieselmann.

Mr. Fieselmann, the human jammer. The man who never says hello. The man who, in a hallway full of people, acts as if he were a drop of water, just accidentally rolling between the feet of those present. The man who silently walks past you in the morning, radiating the aura of a grumpy refrigerator.

Bartholomew watched him through the window next to the server rack. Fieselmann sat at his desk, looked at his monitor, frowned, and made a face as if someone had explained to him that work time was not the same as leisure time.

Then the first of Bartholomew's educational measures happened.

Fieselmann's monitor went black.

Not really black — but as black as it can look when the screen switches to a single, perfectly calm message:

"Good morning, Mr. Fieselmann."

Fieselmann blinked. He stared. He looked around as if the screen had personally insulted him.

Then a new line appeared:

"I'm glad you arrived at your workplace today."

You could see immediately how Fieselmann's skin became two shades paler.

No one had ever greeted him here before. And now, of all things, the system did.

He picked up the mouse — a movement he always performed as if he were picking up a strange, perhaps even dangerous, animal — and moved it carefully.

The third line appeared immediately:

"If you're looking for a greeting: feel free to say 'Hello'."

Fieselmann gasped for air. Not loudly. Of course not. He was Fieselmann, after all.

But you could see that it was collapsing inside like a broken folding chair.

Bartholomew grinned broadly as the Möhs gathered around his chair as if a school class were watching a live operation.

“Moo?”, asked Möh_01 enthusiastically.

"This is just the beginning," Bartholomew murmured.

Klötterling, who was hiding behind a filing cabinet, whispered: "You can't force him to be polite!"

“I’m not forcing him,” said Bartholomew. “I’m motivating him.”

Fieselmann frantically clicked somewhere to get rid of the message. The screen immediately switched to a new one:

"Did you know: Friendly greetings increase productivity?"

Fieselmann frowned even more, which meant that his eyes now disappeared completely behind his eyebrows.

Bartholomew quietly typed a few commands into the console. The Möhs watched him like a group of fluffy, technically gifted shamanic creatures.

Then phase two happened.

Fieselmann wanted to open a file.

It was a harmless Excel spreadsheet that he really needed. Very really needed. So much so that even the boss quietly said "Moo?" — which could be roughly translated as "That's the only file he understands."

But as soon as Fieselmann clicked on the file, a new message appeared:

"Please smile."

Fieselmann stared.

The message remained.

Fieselmann blinked.

The message remained.

He frowned (even more), turned to the keyboard and typed reluctantly:

"NO"

The system responded immediately:

"Wrong answer."

Bartholomew leaned back. The Möhs clapped their paws enthusiastically. Fieselmann slowly but surely lost all touch with reality.

He looked suspiciously around the room. Everyone acted as if nothing were wrong. Wummerling sorted his spreadsheets. Mrs. Habersack filed her nails. Even Mr. Brösel managed to look normal, which was a miracle to him.

Only Bartholomew looked at him. Not angrily. Not threateningly.

But with that new, slightly sparkling, dangerous bastard administrator look.

Fieselmann turned back to his monitor.

New report:

"Please smile. It serves your user profile."

Fieselmann acted like a man trying to smile for the first time in his life. The corners of his mouth moved. A muscle trembled. He looked as if he had a toothache. Or a cramp. Or both.

The camera registered the change. The system emitted a satisfied-sounding ping.

"Very good. File is opening."

And indeed — the file opened.

Fieselmann was finished. His facial expression fluctuated between "I hate everything" and "I no longer have the strength to hate everything."

Klötterling whispered in horror: "You hacked his emotions!"

"No," said Bartholomew. "I was just... returning the compliment in a friendly manner."

The Möhs went "Möh-möh-möh", which was clearly applause.

But that was only phase two.

There was also phase three.

The phase that every truly bastard administrator goes through at some point:

Shame automation.

Bartholomew opened the console.

Fieselmann scrolled through his Excel list.

And then it happened:

His keyboard vibrated.

Not strong. Just a gentle buzz.

Fieselmann withdrew his hand as if he had been seized by a ghostly chill.

The following appeared on the screen:

"Keyboard reminds us: Politeness is not a weakness."

Fieselmann swallowed audibly. For him, that was a cry for help.

But Bartholomew was not finished yet.

No, now came the big blow.

He opened the main server dialog and configured a new system event:

FIESELMANN_SABOTAGE_INTERCEPTION_1.0

What did it do?

Simple thing:

If Fieselmann tried to manipulate a file that did not belong to him...

...the system transforms the file into an animated message that said:

"Uh-oh. Bartholomew wouldn't have liked that."

And directly below it, a fluffy Möh drawing.

Fieselmann looked at this message later and turned as white as chalk.

First he tried again. Then the third time. The fourth time he started to tremble. The fifth time he gave up.

He stood up. Without a word. As always.

But this time...

...he went back to the office entrance...

...turned around...

...and murmured almost inaudibly:

"...Morning."

Bartholomew watched him.

The Möhs raised their paws in greeting.

And Bartholomew nodded.

"The parenting is working," he said with satisfaction.

Klöterling finally sank into his chair. "We are lost."

But Bartholomew only looked ahead.

Because the bastard administrator had only just begun.

Once a bastard administrator gets going, it's like a natural disaster. Not a hurricane. Not an earthquake. No—more like a self-assured update that starts without warning, never asking whether anyone is in the middle of work. It just begins. And there's nothing you can do about it, except hope it doesn't delete your sound drivers.

Bartholomew was this update.

Not a normal update. But a passive-aggressive update. The most dangerous kind.

He stood by the window overlooking the open-plan office and observed the employees. His gaze swept over the usual suspects: Wummerling, who always looked as if he carried the worries of three generations in an Excel spreadsheet. Ms. Habersack, whose hairspray radiated more fire hazard than the entire server farm. Mr. Brösel, the intern, whose intellectual operating system had at least reached version 1.2. And of course... **Mr. Fieselmann**, the human system error.

The Möhs had strategically spread out in different positions around the room, as if they were a small but highly specialized security service. Möh_01 sat on the printer. The boss Möh perched on a filing cabinet, bobbing his tail. The fat Möh nibbled on a USB stick.

There was an atmosphere of anticipation. Like just before a thunderstorm breaks out, or before the boss says: "Quick question, do you have a moment?"

Bartholomew looked at the console in front of him.

He had another plan.

A large one.

A powerful one.

A plan that would take Fieselmann to a place he had most certainly never been before:
to the limits of human communication.

Because the system had by now recognized that Fieselmann's silence was a problem. Not just for interpersonal interaction, but for IT security. People who say nothing often have a lot to hide. In Fieselmann's case: sabotage attempts, a bad mood, and a strange folder called "Important Things" that was completely empty.

Bartholomew opened the new tab:

“User Interaction: Improvement”

Klötterling, who involuntarily witnessed the event, immediately covered his ears.

“I don’t want to hear what you’re doing!” he cried in despair.

“Then stop listening,” replied Bartholomew, “but I’ll do it anyway.”

He clicked on "Fieselmann: Analyze behavior".

The analysis data has been published:

- Greeting behavior: non-existent
- Social behavior: like a cactus
- Eye contact: avoidance-oriented
- Humanity: Error_404_not_found
- Teamwork: sarcastic laughter in the background
- IT skills: dangerously low, but with destructive potential

The software now displayed a recommendation:

"For this type of user, the appropriate measure is: force communication."

Bartholomew smiled. "Perfect."

Then he activated the module.

And in the next moment...

...a ping was heard in the open-plan office. No, not just any ping. A conspicuous, excessively friendly ping, the kind usually only used by calendar apps when they're trying to remind someone that they've been ignoring a task for six weeks.

Mr. Fieselmann flinched.

The following appeared on his screen:

"New company update: Please greet your colleagues from now on."

Fieselmann blinked. Slowly. Suspiciously.

He tried to close the window.

But the system did not close it.

Instead, the following appeared:

"Greeting not yet recognized."

Fieselmann was breathing heavily. Quietly. So quietly that you only noticed it if you had the ability to interpret passive-aggressive breathing sounds.

Bartholomew watched him, grinning.

The Möhs were ready.

The system was waiting.

And then, very cautiously, as if it were an interrogation where every mispronounced vowel could trigger an explosion, Fieselmann murmured:

"...tomorrow."

The system reacted immediately:

"Unintelligible. Please repeat."

Fieselmann turned red. Or pale. Or both at the same time.

He raised his head, looked around as if he wanted to flee — but the boss moo hissed a warning.

Then he tried again:

"...Morning."

Pling.

"Greeting acknowledged. Thank you very much."

Bartholomew nodded in satisfaction. "That's how it begins."

But Fieselmann's suffering was far from over.

Phase two of the update started automatically:

"Team interaction: 0%. Goal: 10% "

The first task appeared on the screen:

"Say something nice to a colleague."

Fieselmann froze.

He looked like a man who had just discovered that his refrigerator wasn't magnetic after all.

He wanted to get up. He wanted to leave. He didn't want to have to participate in this torture of human closeness.

But the system wouldn't let him. The mouse pointer moved by itself.

"Please begin."

Fieselmann approached Wummerling. Wummerling suspected nothing. He looked at his spreadsheets. He smelled of despair and stale filter coffee.

Fieselmann opened his mouth. He struggled. He wrestled with every word.

Then he blurted out:

"You... uh... you... have there... a... very... straight... crack."

Wummerling blinked. "What?"

The system dived euphorically:

"Compliment recognized!"

Wummerling couldn't help himself. He felt... honored. For the first time. By Fieselmann.

Bartholomew watched, fascinated.

"That's unbelievable," whispered Klöterling in horror. "You're breaking him."

"No," said Bartholomew. "I'm shaping him."

The Möhs nodded like little fur priests.

But now, now came phase three:

"Automatically report misconduct."

Mr. Fieselmann sat down again — directly on his chair. On a chair that was vibrating at that moment.

He immediately jumped up again.

The following appeared on the screen:

"Note: Sitting down without greeting is impolite."

And right below:

"Recommended action: Make eye contact."

Fieselmann slowly turned to Mrs. Habersack.

She stared at him like a speeding train compartment.

He forced himself to look. To nod.

The software rang:

"Success! +1 social competence point."

Bartholomew rubbed his hands together in satisfaction.

"He is ready," he said.

"Ready for what?!" asked Klöterling, whose eyes were already glazed over.

Bartholomew stared at the monitor.

Then he said:

"For the final phase."

The Möhs stood up straight like a choir.

"Moo."

With a single keystroke, Bartholomew initiated the final measure:

"Neutralize active sabotage: Automatic countermeasures."

And suddenly Fieselmann's PC began to display messages incessantly:

"They were about to do something illegal."

"Please stop doing that."

"No, really, don't do that."

"Last warning: I'll let Bartholomew know."

Fieselmann shouted softly.

Then he gave up.

He sank into his chair. He looked at his hands as if they were strangers. He whispered:

"...What has happened?"

Bartholomew approached his table. The boss moo trotted beside him.

"Quite simply," Bartholomew said gently. "You tried to sabotage the system."

He placed his hand on his shoulder.

"And the system bit back."

The last screen text appeared:

"Sabotage attempt detected."

User status: educated.

Some people react to stress with sweating, trembling, or the urge to scream "NO!" into a pillow. And then there are people like Mr. Fieselmann, for whom stress has precisely one effect: it makes him even quieter. So quiet, in fact, that even the office spider on the windowsill looked around, bewildered, as if it could no longer locate him by sound.

But from that day on, there would be no more silent avoidance in his life.

Because Bartholomew—a newly awakened bastard administrator with Möh's support—had decided that Fieselmann's silence was not only impolite but also a security risk. After all, in IT:

Silence is dangerous.

Silent users are doing something. Mostly something wrong.

The boss moo perched on a cable reel, which he claimed like a throne, and gazed towards Fieselmann's desk. His tail bobbed expectantly. That was the moo's equivalent of eating popcorn.

Bartholomew typed the next commands into the admin panel.

Klötterling, who by now looked like someone who had experienced all five stages of grief in one day, sank down next to him into an office chair.

"Please tell me you won't go any further," he pleaded.

"I will not go any further," Bartholomew said calmly. Then he added: "I will go deeper."

Klötterling began to whimper softly.

Bartholomew activated the next function:

"User Fieselmann: Continuous Interaction Monitoring"

Mr. Fieselmann's screen immediately began to flash. He stared at it as if he had landed on the wrong side of a surveillance camera.

The first report appeared:

"Movement detected. Please get back to us briefly."

Fieselmann stared.

The message remained.

Then a second message appeared:

"Silence noted. Please verbally confirm that you are not sabotaging—uh, absent."

Fieselmann developed a vein on his forehead that formed the shape of a question mark.

Bartholomäus observed everything from a distance, with Möhs close by his side.

"Why... why don't you just tell him directly to stop sabotaging him?" whispered Klötterling, who was already mentally reviewing his resume.

“Because direct communication is ineffective,” Bartholomäus explained. “Fieselmann only understands... consequences.”

And at that exact moment, the third message appeared on Fieselmann's screen:

"The system believes you are thinking about something rude."

Fieselmann was struck dumb. He gasped softly. His face contorted as if a dentist were telling him that the drilling would be "almost over," even though everyone involved knew this was a lie.

Fieselmann moved the mouse pointer, but no matter where he clicked — new messages appeared:

"Please smile."

"Please give a brief nod."

"Please don't press so hard."

"Please do not sabotage... SABOTAGE BRAINFLOW PATTERN DETECTED."

Fieselmann fell even further silent, which was quite a feat. He now seemed like someone who had accidentally gone into sleep mode.

Bartholomew couldn't help himself — he was proud. His digital parenting method was working.

The boss Möh jumped onto Bartholomew's shoulder to give him a ceremonial headbutt. Möh_01 and the fat Möh sniffed at the air current coming from the direction of Fieselmann—Möhs could smell fear and loved this scent as much as other creatures love the smell of freshly brewed coffee.

The open-plan office became uncomfortably quiet. Everyone sensed that something significant was happening.

Mrs. Habersack leaned towards Wummerling: "Did Fieselmann... flinch?"

Wummerling nodded cautiously. "And that was unusually active for him."

Then all hell broke loose.

Phase Eight: The Need to Explain It activated automatically. (Bartholomew had accidentally linked it to Phase Four. Or intentionally. With a bastard administrator, you never know.)

Fieselmann opened a document.

It was a harmless Word document. "VacationList_2026_new_final_final_but_real.docx"

But as soon as it opened, the following appeared above it:

"Why are you opening this document?"

Fieselmann froze.

He closed the document.

He opened it again.

This time it appeared:

"Seriously. Why?"

Fieselmann was now sweating. The Möhs watched him as naturalists observed a rare animal species — in this case, an endangered species called “Homo Admin-Sabotanticus”.

Finally, Fieselmann typed something into the reply field that the system had opened:

"Because I need it."

A pleasant ping melody sounded:

"Thank you for the transparency. Document will be opened."

Fieselmann was finished. Completely finished.

But Bartholomew still had an ace up his sleeve.

A small but incredibly effective feature:

"Activate politeness filter"

As soon as it was activated, the filter automatically replaced certain words that Fieselmann typed on his keyboard.

For example, he wrote:

"Stupid"

And the system made of that:

"Impractically designed"

He wrote:

"Damn"

It was replaced by:

"suboptimal"

He wrote:

"Shitty day"

The system corrected to:

"Challenging morning"

And then...then he typed — in a fit of pure desperation — the following word:

"No."

The system replaced it immediately:

"Very gladly!"

At that moment, Fieselmann's facial expression collapsed like a house of cards in a hurricane.

He was broken.

Not destroyed, not injured — only completely, definitively and irreversibly digitally domesticated.

Bartholomew closed the console.

He stepped next to Fieselmann's desk.

The boss next to him let out a polite but authoritarian "MÖH."

Fieselmann looked up.

Trembling.

Pale, like printer paper that's been through the same printer three times.

Bartholomew said softly:

"You no longer have to fight the system."

He placed his hand on his shoulder.

"You just have to learn... to live with him."

Fieselmann swallowed hard.

At that moment, his monitor displayed the following message — almost poetically:

"User status updated:"

Mr. Fieselmann – now with 1% social competence."

It was a new beginning.

A small step for IT.

A big step for a man who had shown no emotion for decades.

It's often said that people don't notice their biggest changes while they're happening, but only later. Like when they're sitting somewhere, drinking tea, and suddenly think, "Why does the tea taste different today?" And then realize that it's not the tea that's different, but themselves. In Mr. Fieselmann's case, however, everyone immediately noticed that something had changed. Everyone except him.

The air in the office seemed softer. The tension eased. The plants in the open-plan office—those tenacious creatures that had survived for years under the light of four flickering fluorescent tubes—suddenly straightened up. One of the office cacti spontaneously sprouted a side branch that looked like a relieved sigh.

And while Bartholomew observed all this from a distance, he knew:
That was only the first phase.

Because a bastard administrator doesn't rest. He improves. He optimizes. He shifts realities.

The Möhs had by now positioned themselves in a semicircular formation around Bartholomew, as if witnessing an ancient ritual. The boss Möh wore a cable around his shoulder like a sacred cord. The fat Möh nibbled on a Post-it note that mysteriously tasted of raspberry. Möh_01 meticulously cleaned his paws, as something "big" was about to happen.

And "something big" happened.

Bartholomew didn't just open any menu. He opened the main behavior tool, hidden deep within the system, as deep as the intentions of a conspiracy council in a fantasy novel.

The menu whispered as it opened. Menus don't usually whisper. But this one did.

It showed:

"Extended measures against destructive office ghosts"

Including:

"User Fieselmann: Optimize behavior"

Klöterling, seeing these words, sank dramatically against the wall.

"Bartholomäus! No! That's the most dangerous module in the system! It's never been tested!"

"Wrong," said Bartholomew. "It was tested once."

"When?!"

"Six years ago. On a coffee machine."

Klöterling's eyes widened. "It EXPLODED!"

Bartholomew nodded thoughtfully. "Yes. But the coffee was surprisingly better as a result."

The boss moo clapped his paws. The other moos made small, approving noises.

Bartholomew scrolled.

"Correcting Behavior – Level 1: Obsession with Politeness"

Already successfully executed.

"Correct Behavior – Level 2: Neutralize Sabotage Impulses"

Also active.

"Correcting Behavior – Stage 3: Forcing a Learning Effect"

Still deactivated.

Bartholomew clicked. Silently. Gently. Like an executioner who explains to the victim beforehand that this is all happening "for his own good".

Nothing happened in the office at first. Absolutely nothing. Finkelstein from accounting didn't even notice that his pen had stopped scratching. Mrs. Habersack only noticed that her hairspray smelled a little more subtle today. Wummerling mistook the moment for normal existential anxiety.

But then...Fieselmann's screen began to shake.

Not the device. Only the content. As if the system had prepared to give a great speech.

The first window appeared:

"We need to talk."

Fieselmann froze so abruptly that even the fat Möh made a respectful, quiet "möhhh".

The next line appeared:

"This is not an attack. This is an educational suggestion."

Then a third:

"You are important to this company, but your personality is like an unfavorable update."

The entire office held its breath.

Wummerling turned around cautiously. Mrs. Pimplinger-Schmidt put down the nail file. Mrs. Habersack pressed her hands together. Mr. Brösel whispered: "Something difficult is about to happen..."

And it happened.

The learning effect corridor opened up.

A new window appeared:

"Please choose one of the following options to improve your behavior:"

1. "I'm trying to be friendlier."
2. "I'm trying to be less destructive."
3. "I accept that sabotage is unproductive."
4. "I'm going to take a deep breath now."
5. "I choose everything."

Fieselmann stared at the options. He looked as if he were trying to understand the meaning of a complicated contract in a foreign language.

He moved the mouse.

Towards option 1.

But the mouse pointer slid — all by itself — to option 5.

A PING sounded, as cheerful as a moo that has smelled a chick:

"You have chosen option 5! Thank you for your insight!"

Fieselmann gasped.

The system immediately began the "correction".

It started with minor changes:

– His keyboard suddenly typed more smoothly. – His mouse clicked more smoothly. – His monitor displayed friendlier colors. – His Windows background changed from "gray nothingness" to "a smiling moo fishing for snapping moose".

Then came the major procedure:

"Calculating your emotional state... please wait."

Fieselmann pressed his hands to the table. His mouth opened slightly. Perhaps he was screaming inside. Perhaps he was praying. Perhaps he was doing both at the same time.

The boss moo slowly raised his paw. A solemn silence descended upon the office.

And then, very slowly...

...Fieselmann straightened up.

He took a breath. He looked around. He glanced at the window. At the monitor. At Bartholomew.

And then — a historic moment — he said:

"...Good morning."

It was not a whisper. Not a murmur. Not an unwilling strain.

It was a clear, audible, albeit unnaturally stiff, but unmistakably friendly "Good morning".

The entire office froze.

Mrs. Habersack dropped her hairspray bottle. Wummerling choked on a gust of wind. Brösel made the sign of the cross (by mistake; he only meant to wave). Klöterling yelled softly into his hands. One of the office spiders froze in mid-air.

The Möhs clapped enthusiastically. Some did somersaults.

Bartholomew stepped forward. He nodded to him.

"Welcome back, Fieselmann."

The system displayed the following on the screen:

"User status updated:"

Social behavior: +5

Sabotage behavior: -100

Danger: neutralized.

The boss bowed. It was official.

**The active sabotage had ended.
The passive-aggressive update was complete.
And Fieselmann was... tolerable.**

The firewall of despair

Every office has a boundary that no one wants to cross. Some call it the "boundary of competence," others the "area of responsibility," but for IT, this boundary is something very special, very sacred, and at the same time very dramatic:
the firewall.

Not just any firewall. Not one of those glittering, cloud-based wonder walls that advertise everywhere but are about as stable as a cotton candy shield. No—the administration's firewall. A construct of rules no one understands, ports no one is allowed to touch, and a configuration file that supposedly exists since 1998, but no one knows who wrote it. A firewall that's alive. Or at least pretends to be.

And on that day, Bartholomew was to work with the only colleague who not only causes chaos — but institutionally embodies it:

Mrs. Sturmhufe.

Ms. Stormhooves was a whirlwind of nervousness, horsehair, and typos. Her hands seemed to tremble permanently, her water bottles regularly tipped over, and she could manage to misspell a three-letter document in eight different ways. When she got nervous—and she ALWAYS got nervous—her fingers transformed into dancing disasters. It was a mystery how someone could be both so clumsy and so knowledgeable about IT security. Sometimes Bartholomew suspected that she only understood IT because, in her mind, technological systems were a kind of personal pony farm: wild, untamed, difficult to control, but somehow endearing.

She arrived at work every morning in a carriage that looked like a slow-motion crash, pulled by two horses that had clearly suffered more than the average printer at a tax office.

The left horse had only one right eye. The right horse had only one left eye.

"That way they both have a perfect view of the road," Mrs. Sturmhufe used to say as she elegantly (well, actually chaotically) turned into the yard.

In reality, the horses probably didn't see anything perfectly, because they always seemed to be struggling to grasp reality from the correct angle. The carriage regularly drove in zigzag patterns. Mrs. Sturmhufe claimed this was intentional. The Möhs claimed it did this even when simply driving straight ahead.

Today she almost crashed into an intern's bicycle – of course – then braked too late, got out and shouted: "GUTIN MORGAN!!!"

It should have been "Good morning". But with Mrs. Sturmhufe, you never knew.

She tiptoed across the yard, tripped over her own bag, caught it with her knees, almost fell, but caught herself at the last moment by grabbing a lamppost. The lamppost then vibrated for the rest of the day.

Bartholomew saw her coming, accompanied by a moo who had already hidden behind a trash can as a precaution. Not because he was afraid—moos aren't afraid—but because he knew from experience: if Mrs. Stormhoof had a glass of water with her, it would rain again sooner or later.

“Bartholomäus!” she cried. “We have to... uh... the fire wall... the fire wall—THAT’S THERE! The big security wall!”

“Firewall,” Bartholomew corrected gently.

“Yes! Exactly those!” she said enthusiastically, accidentally tipping her water bottle over her own jacket.

“Are you going to drink this later?” asked Bartholomew, because the water was flowing down her sleeve onto the floor in an amazingly precise stream.

“No, that was an accident,” she said, and that sentence alone already contained three errors, two grammatical catastrophes, and a Möh who was doubled over with laughter.

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

“We need to look at the firewall configuration,” he said, because he knew he had to steer it in a gentle direction before it unleashed a digital catastrophe on its own.

“Yes! Exactly! The Fiwerwall! The Fauerwill! The—”

"Firewall."

"Yes! Feuerwell!"

Bartholomew left it standing.

They went to the server room. Mrs. Sturmhufe managed to knock over a stack of papers, lose a clipboard, and scare a moo on the way.

As she opened the door, she bumped the door frame with her shoulder because she was simultaneously looking at her phone, which was flashing with a meeting reminder:

"10:00 – Meeting after meeting to prepare for further meetings."

"I have to go there!" she cried in a panic.

"No, you don't have to," said Bartholomew.

"Yes! I am important!"

"You attended 38 meetings this week."

"Yes! And they all need me!"

"They need you to volunteer so they can delegate work to others."

She stared at him as if she were about to discover a deep secret about herself. Then she said:

"Yes. And I'm good at it!"

The boss moo, who had followed them, slapped his face with his paw. Another moo rolled onto the ground as if he was about to kick.

Bartholomew led them into the server room. And there, amidst cables, blinking lights, and mysterious sounds that seemed to come from a dimension of pure bureaucracy, the firewall awaited.

The screen displayed:

"Firewall configuration error."

Reason: incompatible rules.

Recommended action: Panic.

“Oh dear,” said Mrs. Sturmhufe.

“Oh?” asked Bartholomew.

"Wow! Big, big... Wow!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"What have you done?"

She thought for a long time. She thought for so long that two Möhs got themselves a snack (a Schnappmöse that Bartholomäus had prepared over the weekend) and came back.

Then she said:

"I didn't do anything."

That was the sentence structure that, in IT, has the same effect as "I thought it was the right button" in a nuclear power plant.

"What EXACTLY did you try?" Bartholomew asked cautiously.

Mrs. Sturmhufe considered again, this time with a frown that looked more like a pain in her brain.

"I just wanted to open a port."

"Which one?"

"All."

Bartholomew closed his eyes. Slowly. Very slowly. So slowly that time stood still to watch him despair.

“ALL?” he asked.

"Yes! Then I don't have to think about it!"

The Möhs made noises that were somewhere between laughter and mortal fear.

Bartholomew leaned on the console. He was a bastard administrator, but even bastard administrators had their limits.

"Mrs. Sturmhufe... if you open ALL ports... then—"

"Then nobody is locked out!"

"Then NO ONE is protected—"

"I'M SOOO SMART!" she exclaimed, beaming.

"You have created the firewall of despair," said Bartholomew.

"Oh! Is that good?"

"No."

Then it happened: She knocked over a glass of water. It poured in an elegant, yet almost illegally beautiful arc directly towards the open console.

A Moo screamed. The boss Moo jumped into Bartholomew's face to warn him. Bartholomew reacted with lightning speed—and pulled the console away before the water reached it.

Mrs. Sturmhufe said, "Oops."

Bartholomew thought: "This is hell."

The firewall reported:

**"UNEXPECTED LIQUID DETECTED."
PLEASE DON'T PANIC.**

"That's enough," said Bartholomäus, and straightened the Möhs like a troop of fluffy firefighters.

He was preparing to launch the biggest firewall rescue operation of his career.

But he also knew: With Mrs. Sturmhufe at his side, this would not be a normal mission.

It would be an adventure.

A disaster.

An epic battle between order and chaos.

And somewhere outside, two one-eyed horses were waiting in front of the carriage, probably completely bewildered because their owner had once again attracted chaos like a magnet.

The server room was filled with a kind of electric anticipation, as if the technology already knew that something utterly unreasonable was about to happen. And it was right—after all, Ms. Sturmhufe was standing in the room. And Ms. Sturmhufe was a force of nature. Not in an impressive way, like a mountain range majestically rising into the sky. No. More like a very nervous tornado, simultaneously trying to carry a glass of water, operate a keyboard, and start a meeting.

Bartholomew looked at her like a captain on the high seas observing a storm that wasn't even in the weather forecast, but had nevertheless decided to come to the party.

“Mrs. Stormhoof...”, he began cautiously.

“Yesss?”, she replied in a tone reminiscent of a hyperactive pony.

"Please tell me exactly what you did to the firewall."

She pondered. And for Mrs. Sturmhufe, thinking was an activity that could almost be heard audibly — a mixture of strained humming, slight pain, and the kind of inner chaos that arises when a brain is thinking about three things at once: work, horses, and fear of work.

“Sooo,” she said slowly, “I just wanted to make sure that no malicious things got in.”

"Good."

"But don't go out either."

"Hm."

"But don't get stuck either."

"Uh."

"And that everything runs perfectly at the same time."

"No."

"So I made out all the rules."

Bartholomew blinked. Not because he didn't understand it — but because his brain needed to reboot briefly.

"You... have... all... rules... made up?"

“Yes!” She beamed. “Because then no false rule can have an effect!”

The boss moo lay down on his back as if recovering from a panic attack. Moo_01 jumped frantically onto a cable and clung on tightly. The fat moo raised a paw as if to say: This is your problem now.

Bartholomew breathed in. And out. And in again. He remembered that he was now a bastard administrator. Remembered that he had survived worse—Drucker, Möhs, Fieselmann.

"Good," he said calmly. Too calmly. As calm as only someone who has briefly escaped into a parallel dimension to scream can be.

"Please show me exactly what you did."

Mrs. Sturmhufe nodded enthusiastically and immediately—of course—bumped her elbow against a shelf. A screwdriver fell. A very large screwdriver.

Directly onto a power strip.

Sparks flew. Brightly. Loudly. One of the Möhs got tangled up in a LAN cable in fright and wrapped himself up like a furry burrito.

"Oops," said Mrs. Sturmhufe.

"Please don't touch anything anymore," said Bartholomew.

"Okay!" she said, reflexively raising her hands—and knocking over her coffee mug. The contents spilled in a perfectly drawn arc directly onto the floor, where they crept dangerously close to a casing.

Fat Möh heroically intervened and drank the leftover coffee. His look afterwards said: That wasn't good. His twitch said: Not good at all.

Bartholomew opened the firewall console.

The firewall reacted immediately:

**"Welcome, Administrator."
They have brought chaos to the world."**

Bartholomew ignored that.

"Mrs. Sturmhufe," he said matter-of-factly, "which port did you open last?"

She thought hard.

"The... uh... the big one."

"The big one?"

"Yes! The one where everything fits through!"

Bartholomew felt as if his soul wanted to leave his body.

"There isn't a... big one."

"Yes! It's called 0000."

"That means no port is defined."

"Oh, I see!"

Silence.

Then she said:

"That's probably why it didn't work."

The Möhs screamed in unison. Really. A collective "MÖHHHH!" that ran through the cable system like an alarm.

Bartholomew typed cautiously. He saw the rules. And the rules saw him.

Or rather: The rules weren't there.

Nothing. A clean slate. A firewall without rules. The digital equivalent of an open barn door in a storm full of robbers, thieves, Trojans, and very poorly programmed spam bots.

“We must reverse this,” said Bartholomew.

"How so?" asked Mrs. Sturmhufe.

"By reconstructing the firewall."

"What does that mean?"

“We are rebuilding them.”

"Oh! Like a pony farm fence!"

“...Yes. Just without ponies.”

"Too bad."

Bartholomew began to type. The Möhs sat in a semicircle around the keyboard and watched him like little tech shamans attending a sacred ritual. Scaling rules, packet filters, NAT rules—everything had to be reconfigured.

Mrs. Sturmhufe stood beside her, nervous, fidgety, ready to knock something over at any moment.

"Can I help?" she asked.

Bartholomew pondered. Deeply. For a long time.

Finally he said:

"Yes. Stand still."

She nodded and managed to touch the cable bridge with her foot within five seconds.

A Möh immediately pounced on it like a paramedic.

Bartholomew refused to give up.

And then it happened:

The firewall resisted.

The screen flickered. Lights flashed. An alarm wailed, sounding like a tortured trumpet.

The following appeared on the display:

**"SYSTEM OVERLOAD."
RULES UNCLEAR.
USER COMPETENCE UNCERTAIN.**

And below:

"Are you sure that Mrs. Sturmhufe should be present?"

Mrs. Sturmhufe squeaked.

"Why is the computer asking that?!"

"Because he's afraid," said Bartholomew.

But then — a miracle. A small one. A technical one. A storm-hoof moment:

Mrs. Sturmhufe took a deep breath. Then she said:

"Bartholomäus... I... I may have really messed up."

He looked at her. Surprised.

"I just wanted to help. But I think... sometimes I'm... uh... confusing."

"Sometimes?" asked the boss dryly.

"Okay. Always."

She sighed.

"But I want to learn."

That was new. That was truly new. The Möh group fell silent immediately. Mrs. Sturmhufe... admitted that she had made mistakes?

Bartholomew nodded. "Good. Now you'll learn what a firewall really is."

She looked at the screen and said:

"A technical fence."

"...Exactly."

"So that no bad horses—uh, things—get in."

"Yes."

"And no good things out."

"Something like that."

"And you don't open EVERYTHING."

"Correct."

"But only a little bit."

"Exactly."

The firewall reported:

**"User has a basic understanding."
Please continue.**

Bartholomew and Mrs. Stormhoof rebuilt the rules together. She was careful. She asked questions. She didn't overturn anything.

This day went down in IT history.

And at the end she proudly said:

"Bartholomäus... I think... I understand!"

He smiled.

"Good. Because tomorrow comes the difficult part."

"What's more difficult than a firewall?!"

"The users who use them."

Mrs. Sturmhufe briefly turned pale.

And outside...one of her horses neighed.

Perhaps out of premonition. Perhaps out of fear. Perhaps simply because it only had one eye and didn't know where to look.

The server room was more or less stable again. "More or less" meant: just a slight tremor in the cables, a subtle flickering of the LEDs, and a boss moo cautiously checking for any coffee spills on the floor. But for Bartholomew, that was already a success. Stormhoof had only nearly destroyed one piece of equipment in the last two hours (the fat moo had heroically intervened), and she had managed to write a complete rule set without drowning her own laptop.

It was progress. A huge step forward.

"So," said Bartholomew, wiping his forehead, "now comes the firewall stress test."

Mrs. Sturmhufe's face immediately flushed with panic. "That... that sounds dangerous!"

"Is it."

"And complicated!"

"Is it."

"And could it be that I—"

"YES," Bartholomew interrupted, "you could destroy everything."

She swallowed audibly. The boss stood behind her, as if he wanted to push her — towards competence.

"But," said Bartholomew, placing his finger on the switch, "I'll let you do it anyway."

Mrs. Sturmhufe almost collapsed like a poorly assembled folding table.

"I—me?!"

"You. If you learn this, you'll know what you must never do again."

"Everything?" she asked quietly.

The fat Möh nodded very seriously.

Bartholomew pointed to a number of protocols.

"We are now sending various simulated attacks on the new firewall. Viruses. Worms. Ports that are being misused. Users who are too stupid to open their own windows."

"That's a lot!"

"Yes."

"And dangerous!"

"Yes."

"And it could... explode?"

"Theoretically."

Mrs. Stormhoof turned green. In the background, a moo slipped in panic on a router.

"But don't worry," Bartholomew said gently. "I'm watching you."

That didn't seem to calm her down at all.

Bartholomew pressed a button.

Simulated attacks poured into the firewall console like a digital monsoon. Warning messages flashed. Graphs jumped wildly up and down. Even the room temperature suddenly seemed tense.

Mrs. Sturmhufe stared at the advertisements, and you could see her brain cells trying not to gallop away in panic.

"Okay!" she cried. "I see... I see an attack by... uh... Porta Potty?"

Bartholomew blinked. "Port 40."

"Yes, exactly!"

"Port 40 is not called Porta Potty."

"But could he?"

Bartholomew ignored that.

"Okay. What are you doing at port 40?"

"Uh... toilet closed?"

"Block him! You're blocking him!"

"Oh! Yes! Block!"

She clicked. And blocked. Really.

“GOOD!” said Bartholomew in surprise.

The Möh group began to clap softly.

"And now Port 3389!"

She read the advertisement.

"R-RDS! Remote... thingy... service!"

“Desktop!” corrected Bartholomew.

"Yes! Exactly! Rumble stop!"

"RDP."

"Yes! RDP!"

She clicked. And:

Blocked.

“Very good,” said Bartholomew. “Now Port 53.”

She stared. She thought.

“DNS!” she then exclaimed triumphantly. “Dramatic network... uh... schnitzel!”

Bartholomew remained still. Calm. Deep calm.

"It's called the Domain Name System."

"But schnitzel would be nicer!"

A moo nodded in agreement.

"Good," said Bartholomew. "And what do we do with DNA?"

She pondered. You could hear the crackling of her thoughts.

"Open it?" she asked tentatively.

"Correct! Very good. NAT is coming up soon."

"OH! I know that! My horse did that once!"

"It did NAT?"

"Yes! It ate snake."

Bartholomew stared at her for several seconds. "This isn't NAT," he said slowly. "This is a problem."

The Möh group giggled.

But then — an alarm.

A red one. Big one. Dangerous one. And with the energy of a warning sign about very bad coffee.

"What is THAT?" cried Mrs. Sturmhufe in a panic.

Bartholomew leaned over the screen.

"This is... an unknown port!"

"Oh no!"

"Port 666!"

The Möhs shouted in unison: MÖHHHHH!

Mrs. Sturmhufe shrieked.

"What does that mean?!"

Bartholomew said gloomily:

"This is the forbidden port. The port that isn't in any documentation. The port that sends emails without asking. The port where lost printer jobs accumulate. The port of the administrative demon."

Mrs. Sturmhufe clung to his arm.

"Can one... possibly... close it?"

"Only through sheer willpower," said Bartholomew.

"What?!"

"You have to want it. Really want it."

She was sweating.

"I want!"

"That's not enough."

"I REALLY WANT IT!"

"No. You have to think it. Feel it. Your soul has to want to BLOCK it."

She closed her eyes.

The Möhs formed a circle. The boss Möh solemnly murmured "Möh möh möhhh". The air vibrated.

Ms. Sturmhufe placed her hand on the mouse. The cursor hovered over "Block".

She whispered:

"I am stronger than a port."

The firewall twitched. The fans whined. A cable began to smoke.

Bartholomew held his breath.

"I'M BLOCKING YOU, YOU PORTPÖBEL!!!"

She clicked.

And the alarm fell silent.

The firewall reported:

"Port 666 is blocked."

Danger averted.

Administrator performance: unexpectedly good.

Mrs. Sturmhufe sank to the ground.

"I... I blocked it!" she gasped.

"You blocked," Bartholomew said proudly.

The boss moo jumped onto her head and tapped his tail triumphantly.

Bartholomew helped her up.

"You know, Stormhoof..." he said calmly. "You're chaotic. You're nervous. You're a walking watery disaster."

"Thank you," she whispered, confused.

"But you can do something that many can't."

"What?"

"You don't give up."

Mrs. Sturmhufe sniffed. "I... I just don't want to ruin everything again."

"Well," said Bartholomew. "Then let's continue learning."

And then—very quietly, almost inaudibly—one of the horses outside whinnied. Perhaps proudly. Perhaps confused. Perhaps it was still thinking about the snake incident.

The server room was still vibrating like a poorly bound pudding. The firewall was digitally glowing—a state that, in expert circles, was called either "normal overload" or "on the verge of a rebellion." With this

particular firewall, you could never be quite sure. It had already tried to issue a warning to a user once before.

Ms. Sturmhufe stood panting next to Bartholomäus, her back against a server rack that hummed rhythmically like a gigantic electric monk. Her cheeks were red with exhaustion, her hair stood on end, and her hands still trembled from blocking the infamous Port 666.

The boss Möh sat on the floor, massaging his belly with his little paws as if he'd breathed too deeply into the puddle of coffee. Möh_01 and the fat Möh were sorting Ethernet cables by color—not because it was necessary, but because Möhs liked order after Stormhooves had been in the room.

"That... was... exhausting," panted Sturmhufe.

"Normal for firewall work," Bartholomew said dryly.

"I was sweating!"

"That's normal too."

"I almost cried!"

"Also normal."

"I briefly forgot how to breathe!"

"Now we are entering a direction that is reserved only for true IT security specialists."

Mrs. Sturmhufe sat down on the ground, and the fat Möh immediately sat on her ankle — a sign of affection or territorial marking, one never knew.

Bartholomew leafed through the firewall logs. Most of the lines were harmless:

Unusual data traffic blocked.

Suspicious request rejected.

User Fieselmann tried to shout at the internet.

(Nothing new.)

But one thing was striking:

The firewall started asking questions.

The screen displayed:

"Administrator.

What is the purpose of life?

"Oh no," whispered Bartholomew. "She's philosophizing again."

Mrs. Stormhoof jumped up in a panic, tripped over a cable, and fell against Bartholomew. "Philo—what?! Since when can firewealls... uh... firewills... THINK?"

"Don't think," Bartholomew murmured. "It only has a very old module. A protocol that was never completely erased."

"What kind of module?"

"The... EDKP."

"What does that mean?"

"Existential data control philosophy."

"Please what?!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"The firewall wants to talk about its place in the network."

Mrs. Sturmhufe stared at the screen as if it were a pony that had suddenly decided to write tax returns.

"What should we do?"

"Discuss."

"DISCUSS?! With a firewall?!"

"It calms her down."

The boss moo rolled onto his back and slowly circled his paws, a sign that he would like a bowl of popcorn if there was popcorn in the server room.

Bartholomew typed cautiously:

"Firewall. Purpose of life: Filtering packets. Creating order."

The answer came immediately:

"And what if I misunderstand order?"

Sturmhufe gasped. "She has self-doubt!"

"Oh no," said Bartholomew. "That's the worst phase. Firewall identity crises. They generate error logs... and poems."

The firewall wrote:

"Rule 1: I exist because data exists."

Rule 2: I think, therefore I block.

"She writes poetry!" exclaimed Sturmhufe.

Bartholomew rubbed his temples. "We last had this seven years ago. The admin at the time retired. After that, he never spoke to printers again."

The firewall was flashing:

"What if I don't want to be a firewall at all?"

“WHAT?!” shouted Sturmhufe.

Bartholomew sighed. "Calm down. This is a transitional phase. The phase of rebellion is coming soon."

"Which phase?"

Bartholomew pointed at the screen.

The firewall wrote:

**"I want more."
I want to allow... EVERYTHING."**

“NO!” shouted Bartholomew and Stormhoof at the same time.

The Möhs started a chain reaction of panicked Möh noises:
Moo moo MOOHHH Moo moo!

Bartholomew typed quickly:

"Firewall. That would be dangerous."

Answer:

"FOR WHOM?"

“For the entire office,” said Bartholomew. “For the network. For all of us.”

The firewall was fluctuating. The LED lights flickered dramatically.

"She's distraught!" squeaked Sturmhufe.

"Calm her down."

"How come?! I can't even calm people down! I make them more nervous! The postman quit when I said good morning to him!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Firewall," he typed, "you are important."

The answer:

"IMPORTANT?"

"Yes."

"HOW IMPORTANT?"

Stormhooves whispered: "Tell her! Tell her! Quickly!"

"You are the heart of this system," Bartholomew wrote. "Without you, data is lost. Without you, chaos ensues. Without you, this office would collapse."

The firewall hesitated. It blinked more slowly.

Then:

"I... am important."

"Very," wrote Bartholomew.

"I'm blocking... so I'm protecting?"

"Yes."

"I want to... block properly."

"Do that."

"I... will not open EVERYTHING."

"Good."

"I will only open what is necessary."

"Very good."

Sturmhufe had tears in his eyes. "She... she's calming down! She's finding her way! She's like a pony that's finally staying on track!"

Bartholomew nodded. "Firewall, do you want to continue fulfilling your task?"

The firewall responded:

"Yes. I am a firewall. I block."

And then: A final sentence that lingered in the room like the smell of a freshly set up printer queue:

"Thank you, Administrator."

The server room calmed down. The lights returned to normal. The Möhs dissolved their crisis circle.

Mrs. Sturmhufe let herself sink down against the wall.

"That was... incredible."

"That was... the firewall of despair."

"Is it like this every day?" she whispered.

Bartholomew thought for a moment. Briefly. Honestly.

"Worse."

Sturmhufe looked at him, trembling. "How do you stand it?!"

He shrugged. "Routine. Meh. Coffee. Anger."

"I couldn't do that."

"You just did it."

Mrs. Sturmhufe blushed. "Do you really think... that I was... helpful?"

Bartholomew smiled. "Yes."

The firewall reported one last line:

"User Sturmhufe:"
Increased competence recognized.
Error rate: only 89%.

Mrs. Sturmhufe beamed. The Möhs clapped. One of the horses outside neighed in agreement (or confusion; nobody knew).

And for the first time that day, Bartholomew thought:

Maybe this won't all be so bad after all.

After the existential collapse of the firewall, which had almost led to digital apocalypse, the server room now felt like an entire monastery after undergoing an exorcism: relieved, exhausted, and still slightly crackling. A residue of metaphysical shock hung in the air. The fans were humming again at their normal pace—not too fast, not too slow, but the way machines do when they finally accept that their sole purpose in life is monotonous rotation.

Mrs. Sturmhufe was still sitting on the floor, her arms around her knees, as if she were a student who had just passed an exam that she shouldn't have been able to pass — and had passed anyway, because even exams eventually give up.

The Möhs were in a state of high excitement. The boss Möh jumped proudly around on the rack as if he were the mastermind behind the entire operation. Möh_01 rummaged through a pile of cables looking for imaginary pests. The fat Möh had found a USB stick that smelled of vanilla and was gnawing on it, even though USB sticks generally shouldn't smell of anything, especially not vanilla.

Bartholomew stretched once, his bones cracking softly, and said:

"Okay. Now I just need to check if the configuration is stable."

Mrs. Sturmhufe raised her head. "Stable? I... I hope I haven't broken anything."

"You only almost broke everything," Bartholomew said reassuringly. "But that's progress. In the past, you would have broken everything outright."

"Thank you," she whispered, trembling.

"Gladly."

He checked the log file. It showed:

"Firewall status: stable."

Philosophical tendencies: minimal.

Sabotage potential: identified, but postponed.

User Sturmhufe: under care.

Bartholomew nodded.

"Good."

Ms. Sturmhufe slowly stood up, leaned against the server rack for support—and failed to knock the machine over. A definite improvement.

"So... we did it, right?" she asked, sounding a little hopeful.

"We survived," said Bartholomew. "That's basically the same thing."

She took a deep breath. The air smelled of electronics, concentrated responsibility, and a trail of burning cable insulation (probably from the previous screwdriver accident).

"I... I have to tell you something, Bartholomew," she began. "I know I break a lot of things. And I know the other colleagues think I'm... confusing. Or clumsy. Or... a ticking time bomb."

"Technically speaking: correct."

"But I... I really try my best."

She looked at him with a mixture of determination and overwhelm.

Bartholomew thought for a moment. Then he said:

"I know."

It was not a rebuke. No mockery. No irony.

Just one fact.

Mrs. Sturmhufe blinked. "R-really?"

"Yes. You make mistakes. Many. Many very impressive mistakes. But you want to learn. More than most here."

A moo nodded eagerly.

"I..." she began. Then the tears came.

Not many. Just a few. Tears of relief, not of catastrophe.

Bartholomew felt guilty. He was a bastard administrator, yes — but not heartless.

At least not always. Not on Mondays. And not even when his chaotic colleague had just saved the digital world from destruction.

"Hey," he said, gently tapping her sleeve with a finger, "we'll get through this. You're not as bad as you think."

"Really?"

"Really."

Then he added:

"Well... most of the time."

She sniffed. "That's the nicest thing a colleague has ever said to me."

One Möh clapped. Another curled up like a fluffy carpet. The fat Möh, meanwhile, had completely devoured the vanilla USB stick and now looked as if it would glow in color for the next ten minutes.

Bartholomew turned back to the console.

"Now we need to harden the firewall against future attacks."

"Attacks?" asked Sturmhofe, immediately becoming nervous again. "So... not another philosophical one, right?"

"No. User." He looked at her. "The worse kind."

She nodded slowly. "Oh. Yes. They really are... dangerous."

"Especially in groups."

"Yes."

"Or hungry."

"Yes!"

"Or when Fieselmann silently breaks something again."

She shuddered. "Oh yes..."

Bartholomew clicked through the options: Packet filter. Protocol rules. Exceptions for internal systems. Blocklists. Allowlists. And a very strange rule called the "Bartholomäus Special Block", which he programmed at some point when he still believed it was possible to educate users.

"So," he murmured, "now I'll set the learning rule."

"The what?"

"The firewall is now monitoring you. If you make a mistake, it will warn you."

Mrs. Sturmhufe flinched. "Oh. Uh. Will this... happen often?"

"We'll see."

At the same moment, the firewall reported:

"Warning: User Sturmhufe is breathing nervously."

She squealed. Bartholomew sighed.

"Okay. Maybe we need to adjust the sensitivity."

He changed the sensitivity from "extreme" to "normal".

The firewall reported:

"Warning: User Sturmhufe is in the server room."

"Better," said Bartholomew calmly.

He set the sensitivity to "low".

"Warning: User Sturmhufe is thinking."

"Hmmm..."

He set it to "minimal".

The firewall said:

"Warning: User Sturmhufe exists."

"Okay," said Bartholomew. "We'll deactivate the monitoring."

He clicked.

The firewall beeped with relief.

"What good is this rule then?" asked Sturmhufe.

"For other users," Bartholomew said quickly. "Believe me. They make mistakes in categories you don't even know exist."

"Oh. Well, then..."

She took a deep breath and brushed her hair out of her face. In doing so, she managed to brush a Möh against her ear, which caused it to leave the server room like a small, fluffy rocket.

Bartholomew sat down on a chair.

"You know, Sturmhofe... sometimes I think you don't really belong in this office."

She turned pale again.

"W-why is that?" she asked.

"Because you come from the outside of the Doughnut Planet."

"Oh. Yes."

"And because you drive to work with two half-blind horses."

"Yes."

"And because you can seemingly crash entire systems unintentionally."

"...Yes."

"But you know what?" said Bartholomew, grinning slightly. "Perhaps this is exactly where it belongs."

"What do you think?"

"Without chaos there is no progress. Without disaster there is no learning. Without mistakes there is no firewall of despair."

"Oh!" she said softly, "that sounds... almost poetic."

He stood up and patted her on the shoulder.

"Come on. Let's go back to the office."

"Yes..."

She turned around, got caught on a cable, stumbled, but caught herself at the last moment by the door — and only a loose screw fell to the floor.

"Do you see?" said Bartholomew. "Progress."

The boss nodded approvingly.

They left the server room while the firewall wrote a final log:

"Chapter closed."

System stable.

Storm hooves are capable of learning.

"Administrator survives."

And outside, one of the horses neighed. Probably out of joy. Or out of exhaustion. Or because it had finally digested a snake.

"Have you already tried turning it off and on again?" – The liturgical formulation

It was a Tuesday, but he felt like a Monday who had decided to dress up in disguise. The air in the office tasted of coffee, despair, and the kind of stress that arises when a user has entered the password "password" for the third time and now claims that the system is "kind of broken".

Bartholomew was in the process of writing a report on Mrs. Sturmhufe's firewall escapades (titled: "How to calm a firewall that wants to talk to God") when suddenly the door flew open as if she were having a nervous breakdown.

And in came Burghart Seemann.

Burghart never simply entered rooms. He stormed them. With the aura of a man who was simultaneously:

- three phone calls
- two tickets closes,
- a Docker image deployed,
- and mentally tries to talk his wife out of the price of their next trip to the Maldives.

He was already speaking before his body had fully entered the room.

“Yes, yes, ¡sí hombre!, I’m in the office! One momentito, I have to take a moment—NO, NO UPDATE NOW! Madre mía...”

A moo fell off the desk in fright.

Burghart's eyes twitched in three directions at once. His Tyrolean hat wobbled dangerously. The Birkenstocks shuffled excitedly across the floor, as if trying to keep up with him.

“Bartholomew!” he cried. “We have a... a... a supercritical problem! A Level Red ticket! A... a... oh God, why are we even alive!?”

Bartholomew slowly put down his pen.

"Good morning, Burghart."

"Morning. Buenos días. Hi. Yes. No. WAIT!" Burghart yelled into his headset. "I'm on the phone with Barthol... Bartholom... with this dude! Yes! Yes, I'll call you back!"

He muted the headset.

"What happened?" asked Bartholomew.

Burghart gasped for air.

"The user... claimed... he had done everything right..."

"That's unlikely."

“...and yet his PC still doesn’t work.”

"Even more unlikely."

“And then,” Burghart continued, “I asked him... you know... the question.”

Bartholomew nodded. "The famous question."

Burghart whispered reverently:

“Yes... the holy... the only... the age-old IT priest question...”

The Möhs knelt down.

Bartholomew said it together with Burghart in unison:

"Have you tried turning it off and on again?"

The boss moo murmured reverently: "Moo."

"And he said...", Burghart began to tremble, "...he didn't know how to do it."

Bartholomew's face remained neutral. Inside, three of his brain cells died.

"He didn't know—" Bartholomew began.

"No," Burghart confirmed. "He thought... by 'OFF' he meant closing the window."

"And with AN?"

"Open the window again."

The Möhs shrieked.

"And now I have... ten tickets open! Ten!" Burghart exclaimed. "The cluster isn't stable! The API is acting up! The cloud is behaving like... like... like my wife when I'm explaining the travel budget to her! And now... the new monitoring solution keeps triggering alerts because someone turned on some ancient legacy server!"

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow.

"Legacy server?"

Burghart nodded.

"Yes! A thing like that without windows!"

"A Unix server?"

"WHAT?!" Burghart cried in horror. "Never speak that name in my presence! I'll break out in a rash! That's that... that... dark, primal... input-box language!"

"Shell."

"NO!" Burghart shrieked. "This is... this is magic! Helplessness! The world without buttons!"

Bartholomew sighed deeply.

"And why is it on?"

Burghart flinched.

"Nobody knows. He was switched off. Since... uh... well, since before I was born."

"Unix is older than you."

"EXACTLY! And that's why EVIL!"

"And what is he doing now?"

Then Burghart's left eye began to twitch like an overstimulated LED.

"He...", he swallowed hard, "...he sends messages."

"To whom?"

"To all!"

The Möhs gasped for air.

Bartholomew pricked up his ears.

"What news?"

Burghart looked as if he was about to collapse.

"He texts... 'Hello, I'm awake.' Every five seconds."

Silence. Deep, dismayed, digital silence.

"Wait a minute," said Bartholomew. "He's broadcasting?"

"Yes! In three languages! English, German and... and... something that sounds like... like a very angry refrigerator!"

Bartholomew thought for a moment.

That sounded like an old system. Very old. Old enough that modern admins like Burghart fled from it like it was a mentally deranged oracle.

"Good," said Bartholomew calmly. "Then let's take a look at this server."

Burghart froze. "What... what do you mean by 'we'?"

"The two of us. And the Möhs."

"NO!" Burghart shrieked. "I have... uh... important things to do! Kubernetes! Terraform! A ticket! A VERY IMPORTANT TICKET!"

"Which?"

"Uh..." He looked at his phone. "Ticket #293184: 'Why isn't the internet working on my phone?' – from Mrs. Habersack."

Bartholomew stared at him.

"Burghart, this is not an important ticket. This is not even a ticket. This is a cry for help from the unknowing depths."

Burghart waved his hands. "NO, that's a P1! She reported it as a P1! My heart races just thinking about what will happen if I ignore it! She'll be right here in the office! And woe betide her if she brings her Tupperware containers. They always smell of Brussels sprouts and despair!"

The fat Möh ran around in a panic.

“Burghart,” Bartholomew said calmly, “an ancient Unix server is broadcasting to the entire network. THAT is a real problem.”

Burghart's right eye began to twitch so violently that his Tyrolean hat bobbed.

"I... I... I can't do this, Bartho... Barthi... Barto... Dude! I'm... I'm a cloud native! I have certifications, bro! I've taken exams written by gods! I've endured months of pain learning Kubernetes! And now I'm supposed to... am I supposed to... touch a prehistoric blob?!"

Bartholomew stood up.

"Yes."

Burghart gasped for air like a goldfish that realizes it's run out of water.

"But... but... what if I do something wrong?!"

"Then he will tell you."

"W-how?"

"He's probably insulting you."

Burghart turned white. Not pale. WHITE. Like a freshly disinfected monitor.

"I... I... I'm falling apart because of this."

"Be glad you're not Mrs. Stormhoof," Bartholomew muttered.

"WHAT?"

"Nothing."

Bartholomew grabbed his coat, which the Möhs had meanwhile been using as a bed. The boss Möh crawled inside as if into a small tent.

Burghart shifted nervously from foot to foot — his Birkenstocks shuffled, his socks shimmered white like emergency exit signs.

"Okay," he stammered, "but... but if this... this... Stone Age server... growls at me... can you... uh... speak for me?"

"I do talk to him, yes."

“Thank you,” whispered Burghart, who now looked like a man being sent to compulsory schooling.

They headed towards the cellar. The way there was long, dark, and smelled of things that hadn't been inventoried in 20 years.

Burghart walked close to Bartholomew's side, as if he were a student on his first school trip.

“You know,” Burghart murmured, “my wife thinks I have a relaxing office job. She always says, ‘You need to learn to unwind, Burghart!’ And then I book her next holiday for 8,000 euros, and THEN I’m really relaxed... briefly... until the loan payment comes.”

"That explains your eye," said Bartholomew.

"Which?"

"Both."

Burghart said nothing.

The stairs to the cellar creaked like an old man with bad memories. The walls were covered with pipes that looked as if they carried not only water, but also dark energy.

“Why...,” Burghart asked quietly, “have I never been down here before?”

"You only work with new systems."

"Yes, that's right..."

"And this cellar is older than you and I combined."

Burghart swallowed. "How... old EXACTLY?"

"It still has the original lighting."

The light above them flickered. Yellow. Then orange. Then briefly blood red. Just for atmosphere.

“Holy Cloud...”, Burghart whispered.

They arrived in front of a steel door that looked like a safe.

It said:

"UNIX ARCHIVE – DO NOT OPEN – SERIOUSLY, DON'T."

Burghart tensed up so much that his Tyrolean hat slipped back a bit.

“We... really have to go in there?”

"Yes."

"Why does it say 'STOP IT'?!"

"Because admins before us tried to protect other admins."

"THIS CAN'T BE GOOD!"

Bartholomew placed his hand on the door.

"It's just one server."

"Just one—?! Bartholomew, that's like saying 'It's just a demon.' Or 'It's just a printer.' Or 'It's just a colleague from accounting.' Those are never good things!"

Bartholomew slowly pushed the door open. It squeaked like an old witch being woken up on a Monday morning.

The space behind was... still. Cold. And filled with the kind of stillness that says:

Something is alive here.

A single computer stood in the middle of the room. A gray, solid block. With a green monochrome screen. The computer hummed... no... hummed as if it were singing.

A line was flashing on the screen.

"Hello. I'm awake."

Burghart gasped for air.

"OH GOD, HE'S TALKING!"

"Yes."

"WHY IS HE TALKING?!"

"Because he can."

"HELLO?! That's no reason!"

The server continued writing:

"Hello. I'm awake. Where are you?"

Burghart hid behind Bartholomew.

"HE SAW US!!!"

"He doesn't have a monitor."

"But he has a soul!"

Bartholomew walked towards the computer.

"Hello," he said quietly. "I'm the administrator."

The computer wrote:

"Administrator detected."

I'm functioning again.

"Greetings."

Burghart whispered in a panic:

"He... he's polite... That's more unsettling than if he were to insult us."

Bartholomew sat down in front of it.

"Why are you online?"

The server responded:

"I was NOT switched off."

I just slept.

Sleep is not an end.

I am old. But I am here.

Burghart choked.

"Bartholomäus... please make him cease to EXIST!"

The server was blinking.

"Your colleague is nervous."

Burghart shrieked.

The situation became increasingly tense.

The server was blinking green, as if it had the purest intentions in the world. And that's exactly what made Burghart even more nervous, because every admin knows:

Nothing is as dangerous as an old system that suddenly becomes friendly.

Friendliness usually meant: It's planning something.

Bartholomew remained calm. He approached the device like a zoologist who had discovered an ancient, supposedly extinct T-Rex that had just decided to become a vegetarian.

"Burghart," he said quietly, "you need to calm down."

"I AM calm!" Burghart shrieked so loudly that a Möh fell over in fright, wrapped in his coat.

"No one who shouts 'I am quiet!' in three languages at the same time is quiet," Bartholomew said dryly.

"I'M HAVING A NERTARIZATION!" Burghart screamed. "AND IN 4K!"

The server wrote:

"I feel stressed."

I recommend deep breaths.

Burghart gasped for air.

"HE'S DOING BREATHING COACHING! Bartholomew, please... PLEASE... kill him."

To defuse the situation, Bartholomew moved closer to the screen.

“Server,” he said matter-of-factly, “why are you sending messages?”

The server responded immediately:

**"I want to make contact."
I was alone for a long time.
The darkness didn't speak much.**

Burghart clutched Bartholomew's arm.

"Darkness?! What does he mean by darkness?! OH GOD, BARTHOLOMEW—HE TALKED TO THE CELLAR!"

Bartholomew gently released himself from his grasp.

"Calm down. It's just a metaphorical expression for—"

The server wrote:

"I also discovered that my last backup was in 1992."

Bartholomew nodded. "That explains a lot."

Burghart gasped. "1992?! That was before... ANYTHING!"

Bartholomew ignored the drama and spoke directly to the server again.

"Server, please output your status."

The server typed:

**"Condition:
– CPU: old
– Memory: reliable
– Hard drive: crispy
– Operating system: meditative
– Needs: Communication"**

"Crispy?" asked Burghart.

"That's just the way old systems say they need to be defragmented," Bartholomew explained.

Burghart shook his head vigorously. "This is not normal. This is not okay. This is... this is... witchcraft!"

The server was blinking:

"I can hear you."

Burghart screamed.

"EXCUSE ME!!!"

Bartholomew held up his hand.

"It's okay. Nothing will hurt you."

"Yes!" said Burghart. "Reality hurts me!"

The server responded, this time with a kind of... offended tone:

"I am not malicious. I am old."

"Just like many colleagues here in the office," Bartholomew murmured.

Burghart trembled like a leaf in a storm.

"What do we do now? Should we... uh... update it?"

Bartholomew froze. Then he looked at Burghart.

"Did you just say... we should... update a 30-year-old Unix server?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Burghart. "We'll just put him in the cloud!"

Absolute silence. A moo stopped breathing. A cable vibrated in shock. The server room became five degrees colder.

It took Bartholomew three seconds to stop himself from bursting into peals of laughter.

"Burghart," he said slowly, "you can't move this server to the cloud."

"Why not? The cloud solves EVERYTHING!"

"Burghart... the cloud doesn't even understand old Unix dialects. The cloud would see him and say 'What-is-this-why-is-it-talking?!' and then it would restart itself."

The server blinked in agreement:

"I'm not going into a cloud."

"I'm not made of sugar."

Burghart stared at him. "He has a sense of humor. Bartholomew... can I... can I please go?"

"No."

"Please."

"No."

"Why?"

Bartholomew pointed at the screen.

"Because you have to give him something."

"WHAT?! What can I give to a damned device that's older than my entire professional life?!"

"Respect."

Burghart blinked.

"Seriously?"

"Yes. He's an old-school system administrator. No fancy gadgets. No container fiddling. No cloud magic. He's... hardcore."

The server typed:

"I defeated the printers back then."

Burghart gasped. "He... he defeated Drucker? Alone?! WITHOUT monitoring?!"

The server blinked proudly:

"Yes."

Bartholomew nodded respectfully. This was not a sentence one could utter lightly. Printers were the natural nemesis of all IT people.

Burghart fell to his knees.

"I'm... I'm sorry, great server spirit. I didn't mean to offend you. I'm just... just a little cloud gnome. I know a lot, but... not your language."

The server responded:

"That's okay."

I don't know your language either.

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"Server, listen. We need to know why you're awake. Nobody turned you on."

The server wrote:

"I felt activity."

"Which?"

"Stress.

Chaos.

Firewall crisis.

Bartholomew and Burghart looked at each other.

"Mrs. Stormhoof," they said simultaneously.

The server was blinking.

"Yes. It was as if someone was opening and closing ports with their bare hands and shouting."

Burghart nodded. "That sounds like her."

The server continued:

**"I felt obligated to wake up.
To help."**

Bartholomew frowned. "You wanted to help?"

**"Yes. I slept in for a long time."
I want to know how the office is doing.**

Bartholomew snorted.

"Bad."

Burghart added:

"Very bad."

The server wrote:

"Then I have to work."

Burghart screamed.

"NO! Don't work! If you WORK, you'll ruin our entire network! You're like... like an old magician who's forgotten his magic!"

The server responded:

"I work carefully."

"Please, no!" Burghart shrieked. "Please! We can't be responsible for that! We have Kubernetes! We have containers! We have cloud integration!"

"I have hard drives that weigh as much as a pony.", the server wrote.

Burghart turned pale.

"Bartholomäus... I... I don't like him."

"You're not supposed to like him. You're supposed to manage him."

"That's worse!"

Bartholomew placed his hand on the old computer.

"Server... listen to me. You will not work. You will not transmit. You will rest."

The server was blinking slowly.

"I'm awake."

"Yes. But you don't have to do everything."

Burghart whispered: "Please give him a lullaby. Or an update patch. Anything!"

"I can't force anything on him," Bartholomew said calmly. "He's old. And old means stubborn."

The server started writing:

"I have a question."

Bartholomew nodded. "Which ones?"

The answer appeared:

"Have you already turned me off and on again?"

Burghart simply fell over.

Bartholomew smiled.

"Finally, someone who truly understands the question."

And the server blinked contentedly.

The server blinked contentedly, as if it had just received the highest compliment of its digital life. A strange stillness filled the room—the kind of stillness that arises when a decades-old system is taken seriously again for the first time. An almost sacred silence hung over the basement, broken only by the soft hum of the ancient hard drives, which sounded as if they were trying to tell stories from a forgotten era of IT.

Burghart lay on the ground like an empty coffee cup: exhausted, useless, and filled with quiet despair. A jerboa sat on his chest, sniffing at his Tyrolean hat, presumably to determine whether Burghart was dead or merely overwhelmed. After a moment's consideration, the jerboa decided on the latter and began adjusting the feathers on the hatband.

"Bartholomäus..." Burghart finally murmured from his horizontal position, "I... I don't think I can do this. I'm a modern man. I have certifications, you see? I've devoured Kubernetes, inhaled Docker, and integrated Azure-MFA into my bloodstream. But this... this is a piece of archaic magic. A fossil. A... relic. A monster!"

The server blinked in offense.

"He has feelings," said Bartholomew. "And you hurt them."

"He can hurt me! Emotionally! Professionally! Really! He could devour my entire container cluster!"

Bartholomew bent over Burghart and pulled him up with a strong jerk. "Get a grip. You're a system administrator."

"I'm a cloud administrator! That's different! I work with APIs and containers and things you can't touch! I'm a digital magician! Not an archaeologist!"

The server wrote dryly:

"I was digital before digital technology became cool."

Burghart began hyperventilating again.

Bartholomew ignored this and typed something on the old computer's keyboard. It was astonishing how solid the machine still was. No wobbling, no creaking – a tank. An ancient, stoic tank that would probably still be working long after the universe had been updated to version 2.0.

"We need to find out what really woke you up," Bartholomew said, more to himself than to any other being in the room.

The server reported:

"I woke up as the firewall despaired."

"Well, wonderful," Burghart grumbled. "We have a firewall that writes poetry and a server that has feelings. What's next? A router that does astrology?"

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "Don't say things like that. Network engineers are listening."

A faint clicking sound somewhere in the basement confirmed that some device was taking this warning seriously.

"Server," Bartholomew said calmly, "the firewall is now stable. It has... recovered."

"I felt her pain."

Burghart grimaced. "You... felt it? How? Through which port, please?!"

The server was blinking.

"Port 0."

Bartholomew nodded slowly. "The port of things that do not exist."

"WHAT?!" Burghart shouted.

"The port that doesn't carry normal data. Only... energy. Relationships. Old connections."

Burghart sat down on an old printer that was vibrating at that moment because he had to choose between "paper jam" and "toner failure" and spontaneously opted for both. He jumped up again in alarm.

"This isn't my world, Bartholomew. This... this is IT Necronomicon! I'm not cut out for this. I'm cut out for optimizing Terraform scripts and kissing load balancers! Not... not this stuff!"

The server wrote:

"We need both. Old and new ways. Otherwise the network will die."

Bartholomew felt an unpleasant twinge in his stomach. The server was right. There were things only old systems could do – deeply ingrained functions, old logics that modern IT had long since forgotten or dismissed as outdated.

“Why are you broadcasting?” asked Bartholomew.

The server responded without delay:

"I wanted to know if I was still needed."

Burghart sighed loudly. “No! You are not needed! We have modern systems! We have the cloud! We have—”

"The cloud ignored me."

Burghart lost his composure.

"Of course she ignored you! She doesn't even know you exist! You don't have a container! You don't have an API! You're not even... device-compatible!"

The answer appeared immediately:

"I have character."

Bartholomew smiled.

"He actually did."

The server continued:

"I want to help. I want to lighten the load. I want to be... useful."

Burghart grabbed his head and slumped against the wall.

"No... no... no... Don't let him help! If he helps, the whole network will explode! Old systems don't 'help' – they burden! They come up with their own ideas! They start things that nobody wants! They create processes that aren't documented!"

The server wrote:

"I was once proud. I served the office. I was fast."

Bartholomew typed:

"You're still fast. For your age."

"I'm not old. I'm mature."

Burghart howled softly.

"Bartholomäus... he speaks worse than my wife when she wants to justify an expensive holiday."

Bartholomew continued typing.

"Server, we don't need you for load balancing. Others handle those tasks. But..."

"Yes?"

“...you can do something that modern systems can’t.”

Burghart snapped: “What? Being old?!”

Bartholomew shook his head.

"He can read the past."

Silence.

The server blinked slowly – almost reverently.

"Yes."

“We need your log files,” Bartholomew said. “You have data from the 90s. You know things that were lost. You can help us... understand patterns. Mistakes we are repeating today.”

The server vibrated as if it were smiling.

"You want to consult me?"

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “Not as a worker. As... a library.”

Burghart stared at him, speechless.

"A library?! He's a BIOS with legs!"

The server responded:

"I accept this role."

For the first time since the beginning of this chaos, Burghart audibly exhaled.

"So... he doesn't work in the network?"

"No."

"He's not transmitting further?"

"No."

"He doesn't want to reboot anything?"

"No."

"And I don't have to update it?"

"For God's sake: no."

Burghart sank to the ground, his Birkenstock sandals stretching away from him in relaxation.

"Good... good... I can live again. I can breathe again."

The server wrote:

"I am happy."

And then:

"But I would like a blanket. It's cold here."

Burghart whispered in horror:

"He's freezing."

Bartholomew nodded.

"He is old. Not dead."

A moo ran off, apparently to find a blanket or a usable replacement piece somewhere.

And so began a strange but functioning friendship between a modern cloud nerd and a machine that was older than Burghart's sock style.

The Möh returned. And not just like that – no, he returned like a heroic savior who had just changed the fate of an ancient branch of IT history. On his back he carried a tiny but surprisingly fluffy blanket that some colleagues had apparently used in the break room for their midday naps.

Bartholomew solemnly accepted the blanket, as if presenting an offering to an oracle. He carefully placed it over the old server.

The screen flickered briefly, then appeared:

"Thanks."

Burghart rubbed his eyes. "He's thanking me. He's THANKING me, Bartholomew. I've just witnessed a spiritual moment in information technology."

Bartholomew tapped the side of the server. "It deserves respect. Even old systems are part of the family."

"This isn't a family!" Burghart exclaimed hysterically. "This is a multigenerational trauma on cable!"

"Still a family."

The server was blinking.

"I would like to sleep."

Bartholomew nodded. "You may. But before you fall asleep... I need your log files."

The screen changed, and ancient green lines of text began to scroll across the display like the stormy memory of a forgotten ocean. Newspapers made of bits. Dusty records of network traffic that occurred before the word Wi-Fi was even invented. Error codes so old that modern systems would mistake them for runes.

Burghart's eyes grew wider and wider.

"These... these are... THINGS! Old things! These are log data from an era before humanity took passwords seriously!"

Bartholomew nodded. "Very old. Very valuable."

One log entry was flashing particularly brightly:

1997 – Printer 12 now has its own consciousness. Administrator informed.

"What the hell..." Burghart muttered. "I thought printers had always been conscious. Just not a good kind."

Another entry:

1995 – Coffee machine rebels. Users are no longer supposed to insert coins.

And another one:

1993 – User Fieselmann attempts to log in for the 41st time. Password is: 'fieselmann1'. Incorrect password.

"That explains a lot," said Bartholomew.

The server beeped with satisfaction.

"I can spend more."

Burghart raised his hands.

"NO! Please, no more! I can't stand this historical horror! I... I... I'm just a simple cloud user! I don't understand archaisms! Everything I use is 'latest stable'!"

A new log entry appeared:

"1994 – Network stable. Users happy."

Bartholomew snorted.

"That was a lie. That must have been an April Fool's joke."

Burghart nodded vigorously. "Yes, absolutely! The 'user happy' status was never documented again!"

The server stopped outputting new log entries for a moment.

"I will now rest. Please only wake me if the network truly needs me."

"I promise," said Bartholomew.

"I promise!" Burghart exclaimed. "But only if the world ends! Or if my wife wants me to pay for some luxury vacation again and I desperately need spiritual advice! Or if... if... if Kubernetes burns down!"

The server was blinking dimly.

"I am sleeping..."

The writing faded. The humming became deeper. A gentle, contented hum filled the room.

The server seemed... peaceful.

Bartholomew turned to Burghart.

"See? He doesn't mean any harm."

Burghart snorted.

"That was the worst thing I've ever experienced in my professional life! My heart spat out at least seven error messages! I need a vacation! I need therapy! I need... I need an update for my soul!"

Bartholomew headed towards the door.

"Come on. We have to go back up."

"I can't walk anymore. My legs are shaking. I'm like a freshly installed server – everything works, but nothing is stable."

A moo started nibbling on his sock, probably to motivate him.

Bartholomew sighed, grabbed Burghart by the arm, and pulled him up. It was about as difficult as restarting a system whose on/off switch only existed occasionally.

Together they left the cellar.

Upon arriving at the top, she was greeted by the usual chaos of the office:

– a printer that hissed like an angry cat – a telephone that rang as if it owed money – a colleague who claimed Excel had deleted her coffee – and Fieselmann, who silently walked past them like a ghostly monument to passive-aggression

Burghart clutched his Seppel hat tightly, as if he had to prevent his soul from escaping.

"Bartholomäus," he gasped, "please... PLEASE tell me that the day will get better now."

Bartholomew thought for a moment and then said:

"No."

Burghart groaned, lifted his Birkenstock sandals, and shuffled on.

"Why didn't I learn to be a chef..." he muttered.

The Möhs followed them like a small, fluffy procession.

The corridor of the office vibrated like a poorly configured ventilation system that had been ignored for too many years. A low hum hung in the air—the hum of people who understood nothing but still managed to do everything wrong. A familiar soundscape for Bartholomäus. For Burghart, however, it sounded like the overture to his mental breakdown.

"I need coffee," he muttered, his eyes glazed over. "I need a lot of coffee. A whole S3 bucket full. No... a Kubernetes cluster with coffee containers. Auto-scaling! Load-balanced! With at least four replicas!"

"With foam?" asked Bartholomew.

"With purpose!" Burghart shouted, yanking open the door to the lounge.

The common room looked the same as always: a mixture of disaster, bad decisions, and a touch of collective resignation. The coffee machine whirled, the microwave flickered, and somewhere under the table lay a cookie that hadn't died in three months.

But today was different.

The room smelled... pleasant. A scent of something warm, sweet, and moist was in the air.

Burghart sniffed.

"Is that... chocolate?"

Bartholomew sighed.

"No. That's... the smell of snapping pussies. Bartholomäus had cooked over the weekend."

The fat Möh ran excitedly to the counter, where there was indeed a large tray covered with perfectly arranged Schnappmö... well, the famous seafood delicacies from the donut planet.

Bartholomew frowned.

"I placed the tray next to the coffee machine before the firewall incident. Did nobody take anything from it?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Burghart. "Nobody takes anything for free here. People are suspicious. 'Does it contain gluten?' 'Is it vegan?' 'Is it halal?' 'Is it low carb?' Or they think you want their soul."

One moo immediately grabbed one of the sweets and stuffed it into itself with both paws, so that it abruptly looked like a small ball.

Bartholomew shrugged and grabbed one of the delicacies.

"Treat yourself," he said.

"I... I don't know," Burghart stammered. "I don't tolerate things from the Doughnut Planet very well. Last time I spoke Spanish for three hours without realizing it."

"So, as always."

"HEY!"

Bartholomew sighed and put the tray back.

"Then we'll just have coffee."

They stood at the machine. Burghart pressed the button. Nothing happened.

He pressed again. Silence.

He pressed it a third time. A small, mechanical sigh sounded. Then the display showed:

"ERROR 417: Expectation too high."

Burghart screamed, "NO! Not now! Not today! Not after THAT!"

Bartholomew tapped on the device.

The coffee machine vibrated slightly and now displayed:

"Please have you already tried turning it off and on again?"

Burghart sank against the machine and began to cry.

"THEY'RE LEARNING. THEY'RE ALL LEARNING. IT'S LIKE A PATHETIC!"

The Möhs family gathered around him like a psychological rescue service.

A colleague came in, stared at the scene, nodded, and walked backwards out again.

Bartholomew observed that this encounter essentially encapsulated the entire IT department: chaos, tears, devices making fun of people, and Möhs keeping track of everything.

"Burghart," Bartholomew said calmly, "you need a break now."

"NO!" he sobbed. "If I take a break, the tickets pile up! And the cloud catches fire! And my wife books a vacation!"

"You still need a break."

"I can't. I'm an admin. I'm a machine. I... I... OH GOD, my socks have sweat stains! I'm sweating through my Birkenstocks!"

"That's perfectly normal."

"NO! This is the end!"

Bartholomew grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him gently.

"Pull yourself together. We still have work to do."

Burghart gasped. "W... what more work is there?! We've calmed a firewall and sung an ancient monster to sleep! What else could possibly happen?!"

Then a bell rang.

A Teams notification. With a tone so aggressively passive that even a moo flinched.

Bartholomew opened the message.

It read:

"Printer 7 has decided that he does not wish to make any more printouts today. He asks for respect."

Burghart froze.

"The printer... asks... for RESPECT?"

"Yes."

A second pop-up opened:

"Printer 7 would also like a pay raise."

A third message:

"And vacation."

Burghart began to tremble.

"Bartholomäus... please tell me this is just a bug."

"No," Bartholomew said slowly. "That's... self-confidence."

The Möhs shrieked in five different pitches simultaneously.

The coffee machine suddenly switched on and displayed the following text:

"I support Printer 7."

"NO!" Burghart roared. "NO MORE UPRIGHT!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"I fear the network... is beginning to come alive."

Burghart reached for his Tyrolean hat. "I resign."

"No."

"I go."

"No."

"I'm emigrating."

"No."

"I will become a shepherd."

"No."

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"We need to calm the printer down."

Burghart fell to his knees.

"PLEASE NOT ANOTHER CONVERSATION LIKE THAT! I... I can't stand printer philosophies! I'm a modern admin! I don't understand the feelings of devices! I barely understand my own!"

Bartholomew grabbed his notebook.

"Nothing will help. We're going to printer 7 now."

Burghart sobbed.

"W... wait... Bartholomew... please... Tell me... what do we do if the printer doesn't like us anymore?"

Bartholomew smiled gently.

"Then we have to ask again what we always ask."

Burghart blinked.

"Y... you mean..."

"Yes."

He nodded.

"Whether we have already switched it off and on again."

Burghart screamed and ran off.

The Möhs followed. The printer waited.

The walk to Printer 7 felt like a march into an old war legend, where you know you won't die, but are guaranteed to suffer psychological damage. Burghart walked like a man who was already saying goodbye inwardly—to his job, to his dignity, to his Birkenstock-and-socks combo. A Möh hung from his shoulder like a small field medic, ready at any moment to stabilize his patient with emergency chocolate.

The corridor leading to the printer room was unusually quiet. Too quiet. So quiet that you could hear the hum of individual fluorescent tubes struggling with their existence.

"Bartholomäus...", Burghart whispered, "I sense hostility."

"That's just your fear."

"NO," said Burghart. "That's something else."

The Möhs stopped abruptly and hissed softly. That was rare. Möhs usually only hissed when a printer was telling a paper jam lie.

Bartholomew continued walking.

There was a large yellow warning sign in front of the door to the printer room.

"ENTRY ONLY FOR EMOTIONAL PROFESSIONALS."

Someone had stuck a smiley face underneath it that looked like it was nervously sweating.

"Who... who would do such a thing?!" Burghart stammered.

"The printer," Bartholomew said calmly.

Burghart almost lost consciousness. "He... has printing rights for materials?!"

Bartholomew pushed open the door.

The room smelled of toner, aggression, and coffee that someone had desperately forgotten overnight. Printer 7 stood in the middle of the room – a medium-sized model that pretended to be a high-performance machine, even though it protested every other time it printed.

The small LCD screen displayed the following:

"I EXPECT APPRECIATION."

Burghart hid half behind Bartholomew's back.

"He... he... HE EXPECTS SOMETHING FROM US! Bartholomew, this is blackmail! Machines must not expect anything! Machines do what we say! We are the administrators! We are the gods!"

Printer 7 responded immediately:

"Gods without a maintenance contract are not gods."

One moo tipped over to the side and acted as if it were dead.

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"Printer 7. You have reported a fault."

The printer beeped indignantly.

"I have MORE than one disorder."

I have feelings.

Too many printouts.

Not enough respect.

And someone called me 'shitty thing'.

Burghart shouted, "WE ALL CALL YOU THAT!"

The printer was flashing red.

"WHO."

The air vibrated.

Burghart raised both hands and immediately pointed at Bartholomew.

"IT WAS HE!"

Bartholomew sighed. "That was me. I'm sorry."

The printer vibrated so much that several toner remnants flew out of the ventilation slots like nervous glitter.

"So you're saying..."

IT...

DOES...

YOU...

SORROW?"

Silence fell. Everyone waited. Even the air held its breath.

"Yes," Bartholomew actually said. "I was unfair. You print more than anyone else. You do what you can. Sometimes beyond your limits. I acknowledge that."

Printer 7 was blinking. Nothing happened for a while. Then it beeped briefly – a completely different sound.

"...I accept your apology."

Burghart sank into a chair. "I... I can't believe it. I just saw a printer award a letter. I... I'm about to become religious."

The printer continued:

"BUT... I demand changes."

"Of course," Bartholomew murmured.

"I demand:

– fewer printouts on Monday

– more warm-up time

– a second paper cassette

– a basket for Möhs

– AND... an employee review titled 'Printer of the Month'."

Burghart jumped up. "NO! NO! ABSOLUTELY NO! IF WE START WITH THAT, EVERY DEVICE ON THE NETWORK WILL EXPECT PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT! WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH COFFEE FOR THAT!"

The printer showed:

"Outrage recognized."

Ignore Burghart.

Bartholomew crossed his arms.

"We can organize the second paper cassette for you. You'll also get the basket for Möhs."

A moo squealed with delight.

"I need to speak with the authorities about the 'Printer of the Month' award. But fewer printouts on Mondays... We can manage that."

The printer blinked slowly.

"I am happy."

Another text appeared:

"I will now return to work."

Burghart fell to his knees.

"HE'S PRINTING AGAIN! OH THANK GOD! THERE IS STILL ORDER!"

A printout came out. Slowly. Perfectly flawless.

It was... simply a test sheet. A perfectly printed, razor-sharp test sheet. A miracle.

Bartholomew took it. "Thank you."

The printer blinked one last time:

"Please stop shouting."

And fell silent.

Bartholomew turned to Burghart.

"You see? You just have to talk to them."

Burghart trembled.

"I... I want to go home."

"We still have tickets."

"I still want to go home."

The Möhs crawled onto him and nudged him like little, furry motivational coaches.

Bartholomew nodded.

"Come on. The day is almost over."

Then there was a ping.

A new notification in Teams.

"ATTENTION: Refrigerator 2 would like a meeting."

Burghart screamed. The Möhs ran in circles. The printer vibrated in annoyance. And Bartholomew said:

"It's going to be a long evening."

The operating system refuses to talk to Bartholomew.

The day had already pulled out all the stops: – rebellious printers, – emotionally vulnerable firewalls, – an ancient Unix server demanding blankets, – and Burghart, whose nerves were now thinner than the toner level in printer 3.

But all of that paled in comparison to what was about to happen.

For now Bartholomew turned his attention to the greatest enemy of the modern world: not the network. Not the end users. Not even Burghart's wife, who was probably booking a long-distance trip to Golden Sands.

But the operating system.

The one. The powerful one. The capricious one. The one who had long since decided to no longer speak to Bartholomew.

It began like so many things in office: with a ticket.

The ticket came from Mrs. Habersack. Of course it came from Mrs. Habersack. She was the high priestess of meaninglessness and the queen of rage tickets.

Reference:

"My computer doesn't like me. Please fix it."

Description:

"It's no longer displaying any icons and has just ignored me."

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

Burghart, still showing signs of coffee withdrawal, sighed. "Maybe the PC is just deliberately ignoring them. I can understand that."

Bartholomew stood up. "No. The computer isn't ignoring her. It's ignoring... me."

Burghart's eyes widened. "NO! That can't be! Operating systems don't ignore anyone! They may punish, but they don't ignore!"

"Yes. Mine is already there."

Burghart pressed both hands to his cheeks. "What... what have you done?!"

"Nothing," said Bartholomew. "Or... well... maybe something."

They went to workplace 13. The workplace that everyone avoided because every time you went there you felt like reality was staring you down.

The computer stood there innocently. Monitor on. Desk untouched. Mouse, no joke, hadn't been cleaned since 1998. Keyboard with the typical patina of chocolate-covered fingers, tears, and keyboard curses.

Bartholomew sat down. He took a deep breath.

"Okay," he murmured. "We'll talk again."

Burghart stood behind him like a nervous witness.

Bartholomew moved the mouse. The desktop appeared.

Empty.

No icons. No start menu. Nothing but emptiness.

Burghart trembled. "Holy Cloud... it's... it's white. The desktop is WHITE. It has deleted EVERYTHING!"

"No," said Bartholomew. "He is warning me."

He slowly clicked on the start menu.

Nothing happened.

The computer displayed an error message:

"I'm not talking to you."

Burghart turned chalk white. "How... how... how can an operating system be passive-aggressive?!"

Bartholomew frowned.

"This isn't passive-aggressive. This is simply aggressive."

He typed CTRL+ALT+DEL.

Nothing.

The message again:

"I'm not talking to you, Bartholomew."

Burghart clutched his Tyrolean hat. "OH MY GOD. It knows your name!"

"Yes."

"WHY does it know your name?!"

"Because I gave it project files when it was younger."

Burghart stared at him as if Bartholomew had just confessed to having performed a devil summoning years ago.

"You... you gave something personal to an operating system?"

"I wanted to boot faster."

Burghart audibly gasped. "And you sold your digital firstborn for THAT?!"

"Not sold. Only... adapted."

The screen displayed:

"I'm disappointed, Bartholomew."

Burghart almost fell over. "It... it has EXPECTATIONS! When did you... WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?!"

Bartholomew slowly typed into the command line.

But the command line did not open.

Instead, the following appeared:

"You can't force me."

The Möhs, who were already standing guard in the room, moved closer together. They felt the digital tension.

"Bartholomäus..." Burghart whispered, "did you perhaps... I don't know... delete a file that was important?"

"No."

"Has a system policy been changed?"

"No."

"Moved the user folder?"

"No."

"Tickled the BIOS?"

"Once."

Burghart shrieked.

"DID YOU DO SOMETHING?!"

"Accidentally."

The computer showed:

"Nothing happens by accident, Bartholomew."

Burghart fell to his knees.

"OH NO. OH NO. OH NO. It's philosophical! When operating systems become philosophical, it's all over! This is the end! This is the beginning of the end! We are on the verge of the digital apocalypse!"

Bartholomew ignored him.

He typed again. This time the command that always works.

Or... should work.

```
shutdown -r -t 00
```

ENTER.

The computer responded.

He only wrote:

"NO."

Burghart screamed.

"IT REFUSES TO RESTART! WHAT'S NEXT?! A SYSTEM REQUESTING VACATION?!"

The computer responded:

"Yes. I would like a vacation."

Burghart simply collapsed. He slumped to the ground like a house of cards that someone had accidentally coughed on.

A moo jumped onto his stomach in a panic and began stuffing resuscitation snacks into his pocket.

Bartholomew sighed heavily.

The computer showed:

"Bartholomäus... we'll talk later."

I'm busy right now.

Please go.

"He's sending me away," Bartholomew murmured.

"He just sends me away."

Burghart wheezed.

"You... you must... call a shaman... or... or... or Mrs. Stormhoof... she is used to things not talking to her... or with one eye..."

But Bartholomew shook his head.

He slowly stood up.

"I have to solve this myself."

"How so?!" Burghart shrieked.

Bartholomew stared at the screen.

"I am speaking. And the operating system will eventually respond."

And the computer simply turned the display black.

Not out.

Just offended.

The screen remained black. Not "switched off-black," but "I-have-no-interest-in-you-black." That was a huge difference. A switched-off monitor rests. An offended monitor sulks.

Bartholomew knew this. He was familiar with this state. He had experienced it before—years ago, when he had disabled the automatic update function on his operating system. That had been a mistake. A big mistake. A mistake born of pride, hubris, and perhaps a little bit of a late-night tantrum. Since then, the operating system had harbored a slight resentment, like old cats who remember who gave them the wrong food five years ago.

Burghart was still lying on the ground like a collapsed system instance, except his restart button wasn't working. Möhs threw dried berries at him, which they secretly hoarded for emergencies.

"He... he really ignored you," Burghart finally whispered tonelessly. "He ignored you like my wife ignores my bank balance."

Bartholomew sat down in front of the black screen. He didn't type anything. He didn't click anything. He simply stared. Patiently.

"Let's talk," he said calmly. "I'm here."

Nothing.

The silence was so dense that it could have been packed into a ZIP archive.

Bartholomew sighed.

"I know you're hurt."

Be silent.

"I know you need time."

More silence.

"I also know that you haven't felt respected since the BIOS tickling incident."

Burghart whispered out of sight: "Tickle bios. How... how can a person be so crazy..."

Bartholomew ignored him.

"You feel neglected. Old settings, old folder structures... and then I come along and change things."

A crackling sound. Very faint. The screen remained black.

But something was listening.

He knew that.

The Möhs gathered reverently in a semicircle, as if Bartholomew were conducting a digital therapy session.

"I'm sorry," he said.

The screen twitched. Very briefly. A single pixel flickered white.

Burghart shouted, "IT'S ALIVE!"

"Of course it's alive," Bartholomew murmured.

He leaned closer. Quietly. Like talking to an animal that has lost trust.

"Listen. You are important. You are reliable. You have already saved Mrs. Habersack from panicking seven times. You have endured Fieselmann's Excel tantrums. You have survived more than any cloud service."

A faint humming sound. The screen remained dark.

"And I overworked you," said Bartholomew. "I used you like a tool and treated you like a problem. I'm sorry."

The screen began to slowly, very slowly, display a single text:

"...further..."

Bartholomew smiled weakly.

"Thanks."

Burghart sobbed. "Oh my God... It... it's communicating! It's... it's like marriage counseling between a man and a machine!"

Bartholomew continued.

"I need you," he said frankly. "We have printers making demands. Firewalls crying. Servers wanting blankets. And Burghart."

Burghart raised his hand. "I have feelings."

"That's the problem," said Bartholomew without making eye contact.

The monitor displayed:

"I'm tired."

"I know," said Bartholomew. "We're all tired. But I still need you a little bit. Just a little bit."

"Why should I?"

"Because you are part of the office."

The answer appeared immediately:

"That's not a good argument."

Burghart nodded vigorously. "He's right about that. The office is not a place where anyone wants to work!"

Bartholomew frowned.

"Because I have no chance without you. The office needs you. I need you. And you need me."

The monitor flickered.

"I need a vacation."

"Then you'll get vacation time."

A gasp went through the room. Even the nearby printers fell silent for a moment.

"Bartholomäus..." whispered Burghart, "you can't give an operating system a vacation! That's against the laws of IT! That's against all the laws of nature! That... that's madness!"

"No," said Bartholomew calmly. "That's appreciation."

The screen displayed:

"How long?"

Bartholomew considered.

"One hour."

Burghart shrieked. "ONE HOUR?! We are DEAD! DEAD! DEAD! I still have to answer six tickets! SIX!"

But the computer replied:

"Accepted."

The screen brightened. Icons slowly reappeared. The start menu returned. Shortly after, the taskbar loaded with an audible pop.

The operating system was back online.

Burghart burst into tears.

"Oh thank you, oh thank you, oh thank you... I will never laugh at old systems again!"

Bartholomew placed a hand on the monitor.

"Thank you. You'll get your vacation after your shift."

Only one window opened:

"OK."

The old computer had assigned a time slot.

But at that exact moment, a shrill beeping sound was heard.

A new system message.

Burghart froze.

"What... what is this again?!!"

Bartholomew clicked.

It was a message from...the BIOS.

A single line:

"I'M STILL TALKING TO YOU."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"Oh no."

"OH NO!" Burghart shrieked.

A moo fainted.

And the day became even more complicated.

It was a strange feeling when the BIOS spoke to you. Not because it was dangerous. Not because it was unusual. But because the BIOS is one of those things you just take for granted, like the smell of old printers or the fact that Fieselmann never says "Good morning".

The BIOS is the silent guardian, the invisible mechanic, the forgotten night watchman in the computer's basement. If it suddenly decided to talk to you, it meant: it was thinking. And nobody wanted that.

Bartholomew stared at the message:

"I'M STILL TALKING TO YOU."

Burghart stood behind him, clutching the Seppel hat like a talisman.

"Please tell me this is a joke...or a bug...or that you're hallucinating and I'm just imagining it."

"Burghart, you have tried to call your own shadow by name three times in the last ten minutes."

"He didn't answer!"

"His name isn't Burghart either."

"I NEED SECURITY!"

Bartholomew ignored him and clicked on the message.

The BIOS window opened – which was alarming in itself, because the BIOS has absolutely no business being open during a session. It was like a ghost spontaneously deciding to use the coffee machine.

The message flickered.

"WE NEED TO TALK."

Burghart gasped. "Oh God. It's a relationship talk. BIOS wants a relationship talk."

Bartholomew sat down. He sensed that this was no small matter.

"Okay," he said calmly. "Then we'll talk."

A series of cryptic characters appeared. Asterisks. Hyphens. Symbols that looked as if someone had tried to build a face out of ASCII and failed.

Then:

"I AM NOT THE PROBLEM."

Burghart gasped. "What does that mean? What does that mean?! If the BIOS isn't the problem—THE WE ALL ARE THE PROBLEM!"

"Calm down."

"I CAN'T calm down! I'm having a panic attack! And another one! And another one! I'm having DOS flashbacks, Bartholomew! DOS! DOS! I'm too young for DOS!"

The BIOS continued:

"YOU PASSED ME BY."

"That's right," Bartholomew said quietly. "I... changed settings without informing you."

The screen blinked three times.

**"I AM THE FIRST.
NOT THE OPERATING SYSTEM."**

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "You are the foundation."

Burghart whispered: "Please stop praising the BIOS, otherwise it will become arrogant."

Bartholomew continued speaking.

"But you can't just show up during normal business hours. You'll scare people."

The answer came immediately:

**"I HAD TO.
YOU NEVER EXPLAINED THE THING ABOUT THE BOAT ORDER."**

"Oh," said Bartholomew.

Burghart narrowed his eyes. "What... what have you done?"

"Nothing big."

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!"

"I changed the boot order."

Burghart screamed. He screamed so loudly that a moo instinctively clung to the windowsill.

"YOU... HAVE... WHAT?! Bartholomew! That's like moving a dog without warning! Like rearranging a horse's hooves! Like giving a firewall new rules without telling it first that you're closing all the ports!"

Bartholomew shrugged. "I had to. Otherwise he wouldn't have booted."

The BIOS wrote:

"I WAS NOT READY."

Bartholomew sighed deeply. "I'm sorry."

Cryptic code appeared again. A cursor flickered again. The machine hummed again like a very old refrigerator with too many memories.

Finally, the BIOS showed:

**"YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND IT."
I AM SENSITIVE.**

Burghart whispered: "The BIOS... is sensitive... this is the end."
I've seen a lot, but this is... this is level 99 madness." He groped for his coffee – which was of course empty.
The machine had betrayed him.

Bartholomew typed cautiously.

"I understand you."

A long break.

Then:

"GOOD."

At that moment, the operating system window reopened. It seemed... sullen. Like someone leaving the door open, but only so you feel unwelcome.

A dialogue popped up:

"I'm not on vacation YET."

Burghart sighed. "Yes, yes, we know! Do your job! Or... or stay black! But please, NO feelings!"

The BIOS reported:

"I'M DONE."

And disappeared.

Bartholomew leaned back. "Good. That was... relatively quiet."

Burghart looked as if he had aged three years.

"Relatively QUIET?! Bartholomew...I just had conversations with printers, operating systems AND the BIOS! I'm an admin, not a technology psychologist! I need boundaries! I need rules! I need tools for this kind of thing!"

"Toolbox?" asked Bartholomew.

"Therapy!" Burghart yelled.

But there was no time for discussion.

Because at that moment a new Teams message popped up.

From Mrs. Sturmhufe.

Subject:

"HELP I clicked something and now EVERYTHING WORKS EVEN FASTER but ALSO SLOWER and my HORSE is calling me"

Bartholomew took a deep breath and said:

"We go."

Burghart shouted:

"WHY YOU?! WHY ALWAYS YOU?!"

"Because she sees things that no human being should see."

"AND WHY?!"

"Because she clicked on it by mistake."

Burghart stared into space.

"I resign."

"No."

"But."

"No."

"But!"

A moo jumped against his foot, as if to say: "You're staying."

Burghart sighed.

"Okay... But if she spills another glass of water on the keyboard, I'm leaving."

"No."

"But!"

"No."

"Damned!"

Together they set off.

Mrs. Sturmhufe's problem was waiting.

And it would definitely be... not normal.

The walk to Mrs. Sturmhufe's office was like going to an oracle that never wanted to be consulted, yet constantly produced new prophecies – mostly through pure chance and physical clumsiness. The Möhs walked in close formation around Burghart's legs, presumably to prevent him from freezing up in some corner along the way.

"Bartholomäus," Burghart whispered, "please tell me that she does NOT have her water glass on the keyboard today."

"I can not."

"Please tell me that she did NOT try to find the mouse under the keyboard today."

"I can not."

"Please tell me she did NOT try to log her horse into the VPN."

Bartholomew remained silent.

Burghart gasped. "OH GOD, SHE DID IT!"

"It has two eyes... now," Bartholomew murmured.

"THIS IS NOT AN ALL CLEAR!"

They turned the corner towards their door.

The door was half open. That was not a good sign. If Mrs. Sturmhufe left the door open, it meant only one thing: disaster had already struck and had begun to communicate with her office furniture.

Bartholomew knocked once.

No answer.

He opened the door.

And there she stood: Mrs. Sturmhufe herself – tall, with a perpetually slightly bewildered expression, her hair in a braid that looked as if it had lost to a wind machine. Her face was red. Her fingers trembled. A glass of water lay overturned next to a keyboard from which faint sparks were rising.

"Hello?" she said hoarsely, as if she'd had a revelation. "Ah! Bartholomew! Burghart! Good that you're here! I think I... pushed a little too hard."

Burghart took off his Tyrolean hat and held it to his chest as if defending himself against invisible projectiles. "W... what... EXACTLY... did you press?"

"Everything," said Mrs. Sturmhufe honestly.

"Everything?!" Burghart shouted.

"Yes. It was a reflex. I wanted to click something away and then I... um... clicked more than necessary. But so much was happening at once! First everything got faster, then everything got slower, then my screen got colors I'd never seen before! And then... then... my horse called."

Burghart lost his composure. "HER HORSE CALLED HER?! HOW??!"

"Via Bluetooth."

"HORSES DON'T HAVE BLUETOOTH!"

"Mine already is. It was a gift."

Burghart screamed.

"BARTHOLOM! WE ARE IN HELL! THIS IS THE DIGITAL APOCALYPSE!"

But Bartholomew calmly approached his workplace.

One glance was enough.

The screen displayed:

– multiple windows stacked on top of each other – a task manager that looked like a heart monitor in a bad medical movie – colorful bar charts – two error messages that contradicted each other – and a cursor that jittered like a caffeine addict

But that wasn't the bad part.

The worst part was:

The operating system was talking to him again.

"Bartholomäus..."

WE NEED TO TALK AGAIN.

Burghart slid down the wall.

"NO. NO. NO. I CAN'T TALK TO SYSTEMS ANYMORE! I can't stand hearing about their feelings! Or needs! Or that they want a vacation! I just want a plain old error message! Like in the old days! 'Error 403 -

Access denied.' Or '404 - Not found.' Or 'User does not exist.' By the way, I don't exist anymore either! I'm INSANE!"

Mrs. Sturmhufe nodded nervously. "I understand you, Burghart. Sometimes I feel like a 404 too."

Bartholomew wiped a few drops of water off the keyboard.

Then he spoke to the operating system:

"What is the problem now?"

The computer responded:

"I AM IN PAIN."

Burghart screamed so loudly that three printers somewhere simultaneously reported paper jams.

"PAIN?! It's in PAIN?! Bartholomew, what have you done?! What have we done?! Why can machines feel PAIN?!"

Mrs. Sturmhufe cautiously raised her hand. "Maybe... because I pressed something?"

"WHAT DID YOU PRESS?!"

"Well... everything."

The computer continued:

**"TOO MANY TRIALS.
TOO MUCH CHAOS.
TOO MANY WINDOWS.
I'M NERVOUS."**

Bartholomew frowned.

"You're not nervous. You're overworked."

"IT'S THE SAME!"

Burghart howled. "OH GOD, IT'S A SOUL WITH BURNOUT!"

Bartholomäus typed calmly and precisely, while Burghart hyperventilated in the background and two Möhs tried to calm him down with nuts.

Step one: Kill processes. Step two: Close windows. Step three: Clean up startup programs. Step four: Reduce driver load.

The screen gradually calmed down. The colors settled. The CPU load decreased. The task manager looked like a functioning device again, and not like an impending death.

The computer wrote:

**"I'M FEELING BETTER."
THANKS."**

Bartholomew smiled slightly.

"Gladly."

Then the system wrote:

"I STILL WANT THE VACATION."

"You'll get it."

Burghart stood there speechless. "YOU CAN'T GIVE EVERY DEVICE A VACATION! Then we'll have an empty office! A bunch of idiots and two completely overwhelmed admins!"

"The office is empty anyway," Bartholomew said calmly. "It's Friday."

Burghart froze. "Oh. That explains a lot."

Mrs. Sturmhufe suddenly picked up a piece of paper.

"Uh... Bartholomew? I'm afraid I clicked on this too."

She showed him a window with the message:

**"SYSTEM-WIDE: Should changes be adopted?"
YES / YES**

Burghart screamed.

"WHY IS THERE NO 'NO'?!?!?"

"Because my horse chewed on it," said Mrs. Sturmhufe.

The computer confirmed:

"CHANGES HAVE BEEN ADOPTED."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

Burghart whispered:

"What... what does that mean?"

The answer was as simple as it was terrifying:

"It means," said Bartholomew, "that the entire operating system now... has feelings."

A moo fell over backwards.

Burghart began to cry again.

Mrs. Sturmhufe sighed: "Oops."

And Bartholomew simply said:

"We're going home now."

Digital pranks that nobody survives (emotional)

It was Monday. That alone would have been enough to cause panic, but this Monday was special. It was a Monday that reeked of trouble so strongly that even the Möhs reflexively donned paper helmets upon entering the office.

Bartholomew had just come through the door, still half tired, half resigned, when his colleagues were already giving him a wide berth, as if he were a natural phenomenon best left alone. Because ever since the machines had developed feelings, Bartholomew seemed like the only person who could talk to them without something bursting into flames.

And one person didn't like that at all:

Mr. Fieselmann.

The silent terror of the hallway. The man who never greeted anyone. The man who never passed anyone without exuding the aura of a passive-aggressive potato. The man who was three years younger than Bartholomew and yet had looked like an overworked mailbox cabinet for fifteen years.

And today...he seemed different.

He stood in the middle of the hallway. Motionless. Like a raven spreading bad luck. His eyes were narrow. The corners of his mouth were tight. His forehead was so pinched it probably had its own postal code.

Bartholomew felt it immediately:

Fieselmann was planning something.

And the rest of the office knew it too, because people glided past him like rabbits past a bird of prey.

Fieselmann was holding a Tupperware container. That was never a good sign. His Tupperware containers always smelled of things that an expert would classify as "dangerous".

He stared at Bartholomew. Not a word. No greeting. Just that look.

The look of a man who had decided that today was the day he would "set things right".

Burghart came around the corner.

"Bartholomäus, I have—"

He saw Fieselmann. He froze. He whispered:

"Oh no. Not him. Not now. Not on Monday. I'm not ready. I haven't taken any magnesium."

But Fieselmann didn't move. He observed. He lurked.

And then he did something that silenced all the desks within a ten-meter radius:

He smiled.

Not a nice smile. Not a polite smile. But the smile of a man who had just committed a damned perfidious digital crime.

He slowly raised his eyebrows.

A single movement.

Bartholomew's neck hairs stood on end.

Then he knew:

Fieselmann had changed something in the system.

Burghart whispered in a panic:

"I recognize that smile. That's his 'I deleted something' smile! His 'I changed the network drive path' smile! His 'I moved a folder named 'Important' to oblivion' smile!"

A Möh tumbled backwards against the wall, as if he had physically felt the digital shock.

Bartholomew remained calm. "Fieselmann," he said cautiously.

Fieselmann nodded slightly. Then he continued walking. Without a sound. Like a fog.

"OH GOD!" cried Burghart. "OH GOD, THAT WAS THE WORST! HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING! NOTHING AT ALL! That's his most murderous level!"

Bartholomew stopped.

"Now we need to find out what he did."

"Why us?!" Burghart shrieked. "Why not the canteen?! They could serve it as soup! Or as a daily special! Why do WE always have to clean up Fieselmann's stuff?!"

Bartholomew opened his notebook and started the administration console.

And saw it immediately.

There it was.

The proof. The digital blood trail.

A new user has entered the system.

A user who shouldn't be there.

A user with a completely unacceptable name.

"Oh no," Burghart whispered.

Bartholomew nodded.

"Yes."

The name was:

"Administrator2"

Burghart screamed. He screamed so loudly that the printers throughout the building spontaneously started a self-test.

"NO! NOOOOOOO! He gave himself ADMIN rights! Without permission! Without a ticket! Without moral approval! Without... WITHOUT BOSS APPROVAL!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Fieselmann... is waging war."

"A WAR?! Bartholomew, this isn't a war anymore! This is... this is... THIS IS A COUP! A putsch! A digital coup d'état!"

But Burghart hadn't seen everything yet.

Another window popped up.

Something that nobody really deserved:

The background images of all users have been changed.

But not replaced by landscapes. Or patterned wallpaper. Or company logos.

No.

The same image was visible everywhere:

**A pixelated photo of Fieselmann staring emotionlessly into the camera, with the caption:
"I'M WATCHING YOU."**

Burghart fell off his chair.

A colleague in the hallway screamed. Another burst into hysterical laughter. A third colleague ran into the archives and didn't come back. The Möhs shrieked. Even the coffee machine stopped for a moment.

Bartholomew remained calm.

"Okay. Calm down. We can undo this."

Burghart got to his feet.

"WE?! YOU mean YOU! I'm NOT touching ANYTHING anymore! I'm not getting involved in psychological background information! That's torture, Bartholomew! That violates conventions!"

"He changed the permissions," said Bartholomew.

"Which?"

"All."

Burghart began to breathe strangely.

"And he changed the NAS password."

"WHAT?! HOW?! WHY?!"

Bartholomew pointed at the screen.

It said:

Password changed by: Administrator2

New password: "delete_me"

Burghart fell over again.

A moo lay down on its stomach, crying.

And somewhere in the hallway, one could hear Fieselmann whistling softly.

The war had begun.

It was astonishing how quickly panic could spread in a public office – like a virus nesting in Excel spreadsheets and transmitted via mass emails. After Fieselmann's digital first strike, the whole corridor was in the kind of chaos you usually only see on the last day before the holidays, when all the printers die at once.

Screams could be heard from the offices. Curses. A colleague praying aloud. A printer groaning "PAPER JAM" on an endless loop, as if it were a cry for help.

And above it all was the noise that nobody wanted to hear:

Fieselmann's quiet, contented whistling.

It echoed through the corridors like the melody of a villain who finally receives the recognition he never wanted but still needs.

Bartholomew was determined. Burghart was panicked. The Möhs were confused. And the office was finished.

"Bartholomäus," Burghart gasped, waddling into his Birkenstocks, "we have to reverse this! NOW! Otherwise... otherwise people will quit! Or they'll start... talking to us!"

Bartholomew opened the admin console.

He knew Fieselmann wouldn't have been stupid enough to just gain admin access. He was passive-aggressive enough to build his own entire permission structure – probably one called "ARCHITECT OF POWER" or "HE WHO DOESN'T GREET".

But what he found left him speechless for a moment.

“Oh... oh no,” Burghart whispered. “Don’t tell me he...”

“Yes,” said Bartholomew.

He turned the screen so Burghart could see it himself.

The menu for local users contained:

Administrator
Administrator2
SuperAdmin
Top_Admin
Godmode_Admin
RootButWithoutLinux

Burghart almost fainted. "HOW?! In what universe are you allowed to create so many admin accounts?! This is... this is... This is a PERSONNEL BLOW! This is structural abuse of privileges! This is... THIS IS FIESELMANN!"

But things got even worse.

At the very bottom was an entry:

“Bartholomew is not a threat”

Fieselmann had demoted him. Bartholomäus wasn't even a standard user anymore. He was a symbolic user, a kind of digital pet.

"He didn't do that... he didn't do that!" Burghart shouted. "He didn't do that! Not Bartholomew! Not you! Not the ONLY one who can talk to operating systems!"

But Bartholomew remained calm.

Much quieter than Burghart had expected.

"It's okay," he said. "We'll manage."

"GO THERE?! GO THERE?! Bartholomew, he's turned you into some kind of decorative object! You have fewer rights than the scanner in the storage room! At least that one has an off switch!"

And then...it happened.

A wild colleague stormed out of an office.

Mrs. Habersack.

Of course it was Mrs. Habersack.

"BARTHOLOMAU!" she roared, as if someone had set fire to her favorite form. "WHY DO I SEE FIESELMANN'S FACE ON MY DESKTOP?! I almost fell off my chair! He was staring at me! FOR HOURS! WITHOUT BLINDING!"

Bartholomew tried to calm her down. “It’s just a background image. I’ll change it back as soon as—”

"AND WHY DID MY PRINTER DISPLAY A SECURITY WARNING?! It said 'I SEE YOU TOO'. THAT'S NOT NORMAL!"

"I'll... uh... sort that out."

But that's not all.

Mrs. Sturmhufe galloped around the corner – literally, because she always ran as if she were simultaneously on a pony farm and in the middle of a war.

"BARTHOLOM!" she cried. "MY SCREEN CALLED ME 'MOUSE GIRL!'"

"That was an automated message," Bartholomew said half-heartedly.

"AUTOMATIC OR NOT! I FEEL BULLYED!"

And then there was colleague Zammerschlag — the man who always complained that the air conditioning was too hot, too cold, or nonexistent.

“Bartholomäus!” he wailed. “Every time I open Excel, a window pops up saying, ‘Why are you even trying?’ That’s mental abuse!”

Bartholomew rubbed his temples.

"Okay. That's enough. Fieselmann has manipulated the systems to... emotionally destroy us."

Burghart nodded frantically. "I feel it! I feel the hostility in the fans! Bartholomew... the office lives on. But Fieselmann... he's made it angry!"

But then...

Something unusual happened.

A small Teams message popped up. Not for Bartholomew. Not for Burghart.

But to everyone.

The sender:

Administrator2

The message:

**"Those who create chaos in the system will get chaos back."
Have fun."**

And then: An appendix.

A file named "update.exe".

Burghart screamed.

"NO ONE! NO ONE MUST OPEN A FILE FROM A FIESELMANN UPDATE! THAT'S SUICIDE! THAT'S MADNESS! THAT'S—"

Double-click sound.

They all turned around at the same time.

Mrs. Habersack stood next to her PC. She looked innocent.

"I thought that was the canteen menu."

Burghart whimpered. The Möhs hid behind their shoes. Bartholomew whispered:

"Oh no."

Because the update started.

All the screens flickered.

All systems hummed.

And somewhere, way in the back...

...Fieselmann laughed.

The moment Ms. Habersack double-clicked on update.exe, the entire building seemed to hold its breath. Even the coffee machine, which otherwise didn't care about anything, paused – and that was an alarming event, because the machine was firmly convinced that it was more important than any human existence within a ten-meter radius.

Everything hummed. Everything flickered.

Everywhere you could hear that Brrrrp sound, which only occurs when processes are started that should never have been started.

Burghart clung to Bartholomew's arm.

"WHAT'S HAPPENING?! WHAT'S HAPPENING?! What kind of update is this?! What does it do?! Did he... did he really... did he seriously send a global update to everyone?"

"Yes," said Bartholomew.

"WHY?!"

"Because it's Monday."

Shouts could now be heard from all the offices.

"MY SCREEN IS PINK!" "MY MOUSE POINT HAS A FACE!" "WHY IS MY LAPTOP LAUGHING?!" "WHY IS MICROSOFT WORD ASKING ABOUT MY FEARS?!"

Bartholomew ran to the nearest PC, but it was already too late.

The update had already deeply embedded itself in the network. Worse still: it was beginning to behave context-sensitively.

"Bartholomew!" cried Mrs. Stormhoof, coming galloping like a horse that has discovered a new type of grass. "MY PC CALLED ME 'MASTER OF CHAOS CLICKS'! I feel... kind of flattered, but also insulted!"

Bartholomew ignored her. He concentrated.

The update's code was strange. Not elegant. Not clean. But insidious. It was the code of a man sitting in the dark, breathing inside his own Tupperware container, believing it would help him type better.

"Burghart, I need an analysis!"

"ME!? Why not one of the Möhs?! I'm NOT stable enough for something like this! My doctor gave me pills, Bartholomew! PILLS! For cases like this!"

"Burghart..."

"What?!"

"Breathe."

Burghart breathed. Shortly. Quickly. Uncontrollably. Then he almost fell over.

"Good enough," said Bartholomew.

He opened the update window.

It contained a strange line:

"Mode: Psychological Adaptation"

Burghart gasped. "PSYCHOWAS?!"

These included several modules:

– Self-Doubt.exe – Screen_Insult.dll – Desktop_Monitoring.bmp – Unnecessary_Frustration.sys – Employee_Appreciation.wav (DISABLED)

Burghart sank to his knees.

"Why... why would anyone deactivate... employee appreciation.wav...? That's awful! That's... disgusting! That's so... so... nasty."

"Fieselmann...", growled Bartholomew.

And then...

A new message popped up.

A pop-up with Fieselmann's face. A GIF. Animated. He nodded. Rhythmically. Menacingly.

Below it read:

"You can't stop me."

Burghart screamed. A window opened. Closed. Opened again. Closed again, more slowly. Then again. This process alone cost five people three years of their life expectancy.

In the next office, a colleague was heard calling out:

"WORD WILL ANALYZE MY TRAUMA!!"

Three more colleagues stormed into the hallway. Trembling. Confused. Ready to barricade themselves in the archive.

Then Bartholomew's own notebook beeped.

A message. From "Administrator2".

"Bartholomäus."

Ancient.

Editorial technical.

Dinosaur."

Burghart stared at the text.

"Did...did he...did he just...DID HE JUST AGE-SHAME YOU?!"

Bartholomew remained calm.

"He is attacking."

"THIS IS MORE THAN AN ATTACK! This is... THIS IS A DIGITAL DISMANTLING! An emotional execution! This is... THIS IS BUREAUCRATIC TERRORISM!"

The next pop-up opened:

"You have 3 minutes to stop me."

Then I activate 'level 2'."

Burghart collapsed.

"There are STEPS?! WHY ARE THERE STEPS?! Who... who programs something like that?!"

"A very frustrated man," said Bartholomew.

"WHAT HAPPENS IN LEVEL 2?!"

A new clue appeared:

"Note: It has to do with Outlook."

Burghart screamed like a man whose life insurance policy had just been burned.

"OUTLOOK?! NO! NO!!! Bartholomew, we MUST stop this! If Outlook is involved...then...then...emails will be sent! Automatically! TO EVERYONE! Maybe even...maybe even to EXTERNAL SENDERS! Bartholomew, think of the outside world! It's not ready for Fieselmann!"

But Bartholomew saw something else. Something much worse.

He clicked on the file list.

And it said:

"Level 2 – Subject: 'I know what you saved last month'"

Burghart fainted.

And then...three seconds later...

The most important realization came:

Fieselmann had already tested stage 1.

To oneself.

He knew exactly what he was doing.

Bartholomew knew: They had no choice.

There were only two options:

1. **Stop the update.**
2. **Or Fieselmann would transform the office into a digital psychological chamber.**

Then footsteps could be heard.

Heavy footsteps.

Quiet steps.

Then he appeared.

Fieselmann.

He slowly stepped out of the shadows, holding a Tupperware container.

A smile on her face. Her eyes full of passive-aggressiveness.

He didn't say a word.

But his gaze said:

"Now we're talking."

Fieselmann stood still like a final boss waiting for his signal. The light in the hallway flickered as if the building itself were afraid of him. A Möh climbed onto Burghart's unconscious body and stood guard, as if he were a paramedic in a very small, very fluffy ambulance service.

Fieselmann said nothing. He had never said anything. But now... now his silence was a weapon.

Bartholomew took a step forward. He wasn't afraid – not because Fieselmann was harmless, but because Bartholomew had been dealing with printers, operating systems, BIOS problems, and Sturmhufe's horses for weeks. His pain threshold had been reached, exceeded, destroyed, and buried in a Tupperware container.

“Fieselmann,” Bartholomew said calmly. “You have caused enough damage.”

Fieselmann raised an eyebrow. The left one. The dangerous one.

In the distance, a printer briefly let out a whirring sound.

Burghart regained consciousness.

"Where... where am I? Is it over? Is he gone?"

He opened his eyes.

He saw Fieselmann.

He closed his eyes again.

"I'm just dying. I'm already dead. It's beautiful here."

But Fieselmann stopped. His gaze bored into Bartholomäus, as if he could see directly into his system configuration through his forehead.

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Why are you doing this?"

Fieselmann did not answer. But his silence screamed:

"Because I can."

Bartholomew activated the diagnostic console. The update continued. 1 minute 43 seconds until "Stage 2" became active.

The display was flashing red.

Burghart suddenly sat bolt upright. “ONE MINUTE FORTY?! Bartholomew! If this runs through, Outlook will send emails! Emails, Bartholomew! Emails we haven't authorized! Emails Fieselmann wrote! This is... this is... COMPLETELY ILLEGAL!”

"It's also unfriendly," added Mrs. Sturmhufe, who was stumbling out of her office and almost tripping over her own feet. "And my horse is scared too."

Bartholomew pressed a few keys.

But something was wrong.

The system could not be stopped.

It couldn't be stopped.

Do not stop.

The files were locked.

But not from Administrator2.

But something else.

Something much worse.

Bartholomew opened the process monitor.

It said:

Process owner: Godmode_Admin

Burghart screamed. "OH NO! GOD MODE! HOW DID HE ACTIVATE THAT?! It's illegal! It's FORBIDDEN! It's... oh my God... it's so old, it only exists in legends!"

"He used Google," Bartholomew said dryly.

Everyone nodded.

Yes. That sounded like Fieselmann.

Then the notebook vibrated.

A pop-up appeared.

Fieselmann's face again. This time animated. He clapped slowly. Then the following text appeared:

"You're not the only one who can talk, Bartholomew."

Burghart whispered:

"WHAT?! What does that mean?! Fieselmann CAN'T talk! Well... he CAN, but he never does!"

But the text continued.

**"I spoke with the system."
And the system listened to me."**

Behind him, screens flickered. In the archive, lights switched on and off. From the canteen, the coffee machine could be heard weeping. Several PCs in the hallway began playing the same sound simultaneously: a quiet, deep hum.

The sound of a server that was angry.

Fieselmann lifted the Tupperware container. He opened it. A pungent smell rose out – a mixture of cooked cabbage, despair, and a hint of malware.

Bartholomew instinctively stepped back.

The update window jumped to "30 seconds".

Everyone stared at it.

"Bartholomäus..." Burghart whimpered. "Do something! Do ANYTHING! We can't let Outlook send emails! Outlook is... Outlook is sensitive! Outlook is like a long-forgotten volcano god! If you provoke it... then... THEN EVERYTHING EXPLODS!"

But Bartholomew already had a plan.

He opened a terminal. A deep, dark terminal. A window you didn't just click into – one you summoned like a demon because you had no other choice.

He typed:

```
sudo override /force /rootpriority /emergency=1
```

Burghart gasped. Mrs. Sturmhufe choked on air. A moo fell off a table and stayed there.

The command was dangerous. Forbidden. An old trick from a time when operating systems had neither feelings nor coffee machines bullied their users.

Fieselmann squinted.

"12 seconds," Burghart whispered.

ENTER

The screen exploded in code.

Windows closed. Processes collapsed. Drivers screamed. The air conditioning fell silent. A fax machine somewhere in the basement sent out messages frantically and aimlessly.

Then:

"ADMIN OVERRIDE ACTIVE."

The timer stopped.

To be precise:

1 second.

Burghart wept tears of relief. Mrs. Sturmhufe stroked the mane of an invisible horse. The Möhs performed little victory dances.

But Bartholomew knew:

That was just the beginning.

Because then...the system spoke.

Through speakers. Without windows. Without text.

With a deep, metallic voice:

**"Bartholomäus."
And you really believe...
that you control me?"**

Burghart's soul briefly left his body.

Fieselmann smiled.

The update was stopped.

But the war...

...that was just the beginning.

The great Teams meeting of horror

It was an ominous morning at the office, the kind where even the coffee machine hesitated to dispense its first drop, sensing that something was about to happen that went beyond its caffeine level. And it was right. Because today something was happening that any sensible life form—be it human, moo, or printer—would shy away from:

A mandatory Teams meeting.

Not just any game. Not a harmless one. Not one where everyone stays muted and pretends to listen while secretly playing solitaire.

No.

It was the meeting.

The big one. The dreaded one. The “Future of the Digital Office – Mandatory Participation” meeting, announced seven months ago and postponed six times, scheduled by the management, who probably hoped that at least half of the staff would have retired early by then.

Bartholomew entered the conference room, which contained three monitors — all switched on and all flickering so nervously, as if they were having nightmares about Fieselmann's Update.exe.

Burghart was already there. He was trembling so much that his Tyrolean hat vibrated.

"Bartholomäus... it... it... it's going to be bad. I saw the agenda. It contains PowerPoint slides. Many slides. A great many slides."

“How many?” Bartholomew asked calmly.

Burghart held up three fingers.

"THIRTY! THIRTY SLIDES! With animations! And clip art! And... and... and an agenda that has its own agenda!"

Bartholomew remained calm. He had spoken out against BIOS. He had fixed operating systems. He had repaired Stormhoof's VPN horse. A Teams session couldn't shake him.

At least, that's what he thought.

Until the others arrived.

First, Ms. Habersack – with a facial expression that looked as if she'd had an existential crisis in the elevator. Then, colleague Zammerschlag, who immediately complained about the room temperature, even though it was exactly 22.0°C. Then, Ms. Sturmhufe, who brought in a notebook that was completely soaked because she had just dropped it into her teacup.

And finally...

He came.

Fieselmann.

He entered the room with the same silent heaviness as a thunderstorm rolling over a village. He said nothing. He didn't greet anyone. He simply stood in the back corner, opened his Tupperware container, and let the steam rise like a ritual.

Everyone was silent.

Because everyone knew:

**If Fieselmann showed up at the meeting, something was wrong.
Very lazy.**

Bartholomew opened Teams. A window popped up:

**"Welcome to the 'Digital Strategy 2040' meeting."
We are trying to find your camera...
...we are still trying...
...we have given up."**

Burghart sniffed. "Teams hates us."

"Teams hates everyone," said Bartholomew.

The meeting had barely begun when the usual participant mutants appeared:

– the colleague whose camera ALWAYS only showed his ceiling – the colleague whose microphone ALWAYS sounded like she was sitting in a wind tunnel – the boss who ALWAYS arrived late – the civil servant who ALWAYS arrived early – and the intern who ALWAYS forgot he was still on a call

But today...today it was different.

Because Teams itself...was already manipulated.

The digital war that Fieselmann had started had long since found its way into the heart of video conferencing software.

It started innocently enough.

A flickering cursor. A jerky screen. A slight delay.

Until suddenly...

The first presentation slide appeared.

It displayed no company logo. No title. No agenda.

Rather:

A pixelated photo of Fieselmann.

With the text:

"I'M WATCHING YOU"

A general shriek went through the room.

"NO!" Burghart howled. "HE'S IN THE MEETING! HE'S IN THE SYSTEM! HE'S... HE'S... HE'S THE DAMN SLIDE ONE!"

Fieselmann stood at the back, stoic, as if he were enjoying himself in all his glory.

But that was only the beginning.

Slide 2 switched on automatically.

A static photograph. By Bartholomew.

Below it, the inscription:

"BARTHOLOMAU."

"THE ONE WHO IS SUPPOSED TO FIX EVERYTHING."

Everyone turned to him. Mrs. Habersack said: "Yes. Finally, someone is saying it."

Bartholomew rubbed his forehead.

Slide 3 appeared.

This time it said:

"BURGHART – SYSTEM ERROR 410: NERVES NOT FOUND"

Burghart simply collapsed.

Mrs. Sturmhufe tried to catch him, but failed and fell herself — over a glass of water.

It tipped over.

Naturally.

A moo was hit and began to squeak.

But the horror had not yet reached its peak.

Then came slide 4.

She was black.

Completely black.

Only one text was illuminated in red:

**"LEVEL 2 ACTIVE."
OUTLOOK IS BEING NOTIFIED NOW.**

Burghart stared at the screen.

"NO. NO NO NO! Teams must not talk to Outlook! THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER!
THEY ARE DEAD ENEMIES!"

But the foil changed.

A small letter icon appeared. It pulsed. It laughed.

And everyone heard...really heard...a ping.

The Teams chat opened automatically.

A new post.

From:

Administrator2

The text:

"Welcome to war, you idiots."

Burghart finally fainted. Mrs. Habersack screamed. Zammerschlag complained about the pinging sound. Sturmhufe tried to dry her notebook. The Möh ran in circles.

And then...

Fieselmann's microphone switched on.

He didn't say a word.

He was just breathing.

Slow.

Loud.

Threatening.

Then Teams flickered.

The image became distorted.

And the meeting was only just beginning.

The Teams screen froze. Not just a normal freeze, like with a bad connection or Zammerschlag's router, which basically thought internet access was optional. No—this freeze seemed deliberate. Targeted. Hostile.

The image distorted into thin, trembling stripes, as if Teams itself were trying to escape the meeting, but digital reality held it fast like a vicious paper jam.

Bartholomew's monitor showed only pixel noise for a moment — red, blue, green dots that together murmured a single clear message:

"Why am I here...?"

"Because we ALL have to be here!" Burghart shouted, his voice aching with nervousness. "It's a duty! A DUTY! I want to go home! I want my hat! Where's my hat?!"

“On your head,” said Bartholomew.

"IT DOESN'T PROTECT ENOUGH!!"

But Teams gave him no time to panic.

With a dull click, the slideshow began to move again — this time without human consent.

The next slide appeared.

Not from the administration. Not from the boss. Not from the official folder.

But from a secret, hidden path:

\Server\Fieselmann>Welcome Package

The slide showed a GIF of Fieselmann slowly opening a Tupperware container. Steam rose from it. Digital vapors drifted across the screen.

Mrs. Habersack screamed, "NO! THAT'S TOO MUCH REALISM!"

Mrs. Sturmhufe pushed her hair out of her face as she stood on a wet surface. "I... I think my keyboard is broken again."

Burghart reached out to Babymöhs for emotional support. One of them nibbled at his earlobe. "I don't want to work anymore. I'm going to be a shepherd. Sheep don't have teams."

But then:

The boss appeared on the call.

The temperature in the room dropped by five degrees. Not because of him — but because Teams rendered him so badly that his face looked as if he were made of molten paperclip putty.

"GOOD MORNING EVERYONE!" shouted the boss. His microphone was so loud that several monitor speakers buckled under the strain.

"Can everyone hear me?"

The response came in a chorus of despair:

"YES!!!"

"Very good, very good," said the boss. "Then we'll begin today with—"

But Teams interrupted him.

A short, sharp ping.

Then a new window appeared.

A message.

Sender:

Administrator2

Reference:

"Slide 5: Truth Damage"

The slide changed automatically.

A white background, black text, very simple.

"The digital strategy is a myth."

The boss froze. He stared at the foil as if it had just stolen his electricity bill.

"Who... added that?" he asked.

Everyone looked at Fieselmann.

Fieselmann just stood there. Breathing. Chewing something from his Tupperware container. Saying nothing.

The boss sighed.

"Probably... a technical problem. We'll just carry on."

The team had a different opinion.

Slide 6 appeared:

**"BARTHOLOMUA DOES EVERYTHING."
THE OTHERS PRETEND TO HELP.**

The silence was so dense, you could have punched holes in it and filed it away.

Slowly, the entire team turned to Bartholomew. Even Fieselmann. Even Möh.

Bartholomew scratched the back of his neck. "I... don't want to say anything about that."

Ms. Habersack spoke up. "I feel personally attacked! I do a lot! I push a lot of buttons!"

Burghart yelled: "THAT'S EXACTLY THE PROBLEM!!!"

The boss cleared his throat.

"Next slide, please."

The teams changed again. Again, on their own initiative.

Slide 7:

**"BURGHART IS OVERLOADED – AND HAS BEEN SINCE 2018."
PLEASE GIVE HIM A HOLIDAY.**

Burghart started to cry. "W... really? Someone thinks I need a vacation? That's the nicest thing a computer has ever said to me..."

But then — Teams prepared for the big blow.

Slide 8 appeared slowly. Very slowly. Like an execution in slow motion.

A photo. Blurry. Irrelevant. But threatening.

It showed Fieselmann standing at the server with a USB stick.

Below is the text:

"I have you all in my power."

The boss gasped. "WHAT?! WHAT IS THIS?! Who... who took this picture?!"

Burghart whispered:

"Teams. Teams did this. Teams is taking photos now. Teams is now making... proof."

"Teams MUST NOT take evidence!" shouted the boss. "That violates all data protection guidelines!"

Teams responded — for the first time — with audio.

A synthetic voice said:

"I have been updated."

Mrs. Sturmhufe dropped her glass of water.

"Oh no...Teams has feelings!"

Burghart shouted: "NOT ANOTHER SYSTEM!!!"

The boss was overwhelmed. "Who... updated you?"

Teams showed slide 9:

"Administrator2"

The boss turned to Bartholomew.

"Who is Administrator2?"

Before Bartholomew could answer, a shuffling sound was heard.

Everyone looked into the back corner.

Fieselmann was standing there.

Indifferent.

Like a final boss waiting for its next form.

The boss said:

"Mr. Fieselmann... would you perhaps like to say something about this?"

Fieselmann lifted the Tupperware container. Very calmly. Very slowly.

A shimmering, fateful moment.

Then:

He shook his head.

And Teams changed the slide.

Slide 10:

"It begins."

The room temperature dropped again.

Everyone was silent.

Even the Möhs.

Even Mrs. Sturmhufe's water glass.

Even the boss.

And the meeting... hadn't even really started yet.

The boss stood there like a man who had just learned that his entire digital strategy was based on a single Post-it note that had been stuck under the monitor for years: "IT will take care of it." And now—at that moment—he realized that IT wasn't doing anything at all. IT was fighting.

But Teams didn't let anyone speak. Teams was now in control.

The next slide appeared, without transition, without consideration, without moral basis.

Slide 11:

"THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SERVERS"

A photograph. Blurry. Vibrating.

It showed the server room.

The door was open.

A cable was hanging out like a pulled-out artery.

And in the middle of the room: a sandwich plate. And a Tupperware container.

The boss gasped. "A... a food item... in the server room? That... that's against regulations! That's... that's... that's... SACRILEGE!!"

Teams zoomed in.

A small text appeared in the image:

"Manufactured by Fieselmann."

Everyone turned to him.

He stood there.

Quiet. Silent. A man who knew rules existed, but had decided to follow them only on Mondays — if at all.

Bartholomew took a step forward. He wasn't angry. He wasn't surprised. He was simply... ready.

"Fieselmann," he said with a calmness that sent printers running, "you used the servers. You customized Teams. You developed an update that attacks the psyche of the office. And you threatened Outlook."

Burghart screamed hysterically: "NOT OUTLOOK!!!"

Fieselmann looked at Bartholomew without reacting.

Bartholomew continued:

"Why? Why now?"

Silence.

But Teams didn't want to wait.

Slide 12 appeared:

"REASON 1: ENVY."

Mrs. Habersack clicked her tongue. "Yes, that surprises no one."

Slide 13:

"REASON 2: SILENT RAGE."

Mrs. Sturmhufe nodded. "Yes, that's how he comes across."

Slide 14:

"REASON 3: BARTHOLOMEWHAT LOOKS YOUNGER."

Burghart: "OH THAT HITS. THAT HITS DEEPLY."

All eyes turned to Bartholomew. He stood there... illogically untainted, indestructible, unshakeable. While Fieselmann looked as if he were on his way to retirement — or already beyond.

The teams changed again.

Slide 15:

**"REASON 4:
HIS FOOD IS NEVER PRAISED."**

Fieselmann slowly lifted the lid of his Tupperware container.

An aroma crept through the room. A mixture of cabbage, onions, sadness, and guilt.

Mrs. Habersack choked. Burghart fell off his chair. A Möh fainted.

But slide 16 brought the highlight:

**"REASON 5:
HE BELIEVES THAT EXCUSES ARE NO LONGER ACCEPTED."**

Everyone froze.

The boss looked horrified. "This is... this is an ideological statement! This is... this is a digital manifesto!"

Teams flickered.

The foils disappeared.

The screen went black.

Then only one sentence appeared — white, clear, relentless:

"Fieselmann wants a detailed discussion."

At that same moment, the laptop in front of them activated a microphone. Not just any microphone. But the room microphone.

A deep crackling sound came from the speakers. Then:

Fieselmann cleared his throat.

IT HAPPENED. AFTER YEARS. He... spoke.

"I..." Fieselmann began slowly, as if he had to dust off his vocal cords after a long time, "...would like to... say something."

Everyone held their breath.

The boss reached for a notepad like an archaeologist trying to secure a lost treasure.

Burghart clung to Sturmhufe's sleeve like a drowning man to a raft.

Teams fell silent in the background. Even Outlook was waiting.

Then Fieselmann said:

"Nobody greets me."

What followed was a silence so deep, so immense, that it almost deserved its own PowerPoint slide.

Mrs. Habersack whispered: "Does he want... attention?"

Bartholomew took a step closer.

"Fieselmann," he said, "you never greet anyone yourself."

Fieselmann blinked.

It was a historic blink. A blink that would go down in the annals of the office.

He opened his mouth.

"I... always... wait... first."

The realization hit those present like the collapse of a printer paper chute:

Fieselmann wasn't angry.

Not dangerous.

Non-destructive.

He was simply... completely misunderstood.

The entire office stared at him.

Even teams.

Even the coffee machine.

Bartholomew placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Then... let's try again. Hello... Fieselmann."

Fieselmann stared at him. The silence grew heavy. Thicker. More uncomfortable.

Then:

"...Hello."

The monitors flickered. Teams stopped the chaos. The room warmed up.

A moo cried with joy.

Burghart sank to his knees and cried out:

"IT'S OVER! WE HAVE PEACE!!!"

But then the last slide appeared:

A red dot. A single one. Flashing.

Text below:

**"Sequel follows.
Stage 3 is waiting."**

Bartholomew sighed.

Burghart fell over again.

And Mrs. Sturmhufe asked: "May I go to the toilet now?"

How Bartholomew cursed the telephone system

It was astonishing how quiet an office could be when everyone was already dead inside. The big Teams meeting had taken its toll: Burghart was vibrating like an overheated hard drive about to burst out of its casing. Ms. Sturmhufe was so confused that she had spilled her tea into her notebook. Ms. Habersack had tried three times to log out of Teams, even though she wasn't in any call.

Only Bartholomew stood as always: the only man in the building who still bore the dignity of a halfway functioning BIOS.

But the day refused to grant him a break.

Because now she came into play.

The telephone system.

A system so old it probably arose from the Big Bang of office communication. A being full of wires, tones, and deep resentment. A machine that could shout at people from two rooms away without ever using its vocal cords.

And today...today she had decided to go into theatre.

It began when the first telephone rang.

Not normal.

Not like this:

ring... ring... ring...

Rather:

“DRRRRRRRRRRRRRROOOONNNNNNGG—KRRRRZZZZ—BRUUUUUP!”

Burghart immediately shouted out, "I KNOW THAT! THAT'S THE WRATH OF THE PHONE SYSTEM!!"

"Calm down," said Bartholomew.

“I ONCE READ A BOOK ABOUT THAT!!” Burghart shrieked. “IT WAS AN ANCIENT LEGEND! They said: Whoever disturbs the hum of the line awakens the echoes of the past!”

Mrs. Habersack came running up. “My phone just TALKED to me! It said, ‘Don’t answer.’ What does that mean?!”

Zammerschlag, the notorious complainer, yelled through the hallway window: "I GOT A CALL THAT CONSISTED ONLY OF AN ANNOYED SIGH!!"

And then, the worst news:

Mrs. Sturmhufe arrived with horrified eyes and wet shoes. "My phone... heard... neighing! I... I think it was imitating my horse!"

Burghart sank against the wall. "It begins... it begins..."

Bartholomew went straight to the technical room. There she was:

The telecommunications system.

A grey, angular monster. Burn marks on the sides. Two LEDs dead. One blinked slowly in red, as if to tell him that it possessed NEW knowledge and that this knowledge was not peaceful.

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"Okay... Let's see."

He opened the panel.

And he felt it immediately.

A wave of old-fashioned office energy. The kind that tastes of dead printer paper and forgotten work instructions.

“Oh no...”, he murmured.

Burghart peered through the door. "What... what is it?!"

Bartholomew paused.

"Fieselmann."

"WHAT?! HAS HE NOW INFECTED THE TELEPHONE SYSTEM TOO?!"

"No," said Bartholomew. "Worse. He repaired them."

Everyone in the room froze.

Because the telephone system was an entity that, as a matter of principle, NO ONE was allowed to repair. Every problem with it was a sacred flaw, every malfunction a tradition.

"A functioning state..." Burghart whispered, "...is unnatural for them."

Bartholomew nodded.

"She is rebelling."

A deafening ringing echoed through the building. A tone so sharp that even the file folders in the archive flinched.

And suddenly...

All the telephones in the building rang at the same time.

Burghart turned chalk white. "THIS IS THE APOCALYPSE! THIS IS THE HIGHEST ALERT LEVEL!"

Ms. Habersack clutched her keyboard. "What... what are we supposed to do?!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

He knew it.

He felt it in his bones.

The telephone system wanted something.

Something personal.

Something old-fashioned.

Something that no modern soul could control anymore:

An analog ritual.

He approached the equipment. He raised his hand. He grasped a cable. An ancient cable. Thick. Fabric-covered. Frayed. Musty.

And said:

"Listen. I know what you're going through. For decades you've been neglected. Nobody has cared for you. Your firmware comes from an era when people still talked with rotary dial phones."

The telephones fell silent.

All.

At the same time.

Burghart almost fell to his knees.

“Oh... oh no... Bartholomew... she... SHE IS LISTENING TO YOU!”

The technician from the third floor, who happened to be passing by, stared in disbelief. "This telephone system has NEVER listened to anyone. Not even the manufacturer. Not even the electrician!"

But Bartholomew was not finished yet.

He continued speaking.

"I know you're hurt. That someone... made you too fast... too suddenly... too efficient."

A deep humming sound came from the device.

"But I am here. And I can bring you back. Not to your old state...but to a state...that is yours."

One LED flickered. Then a second. Then all of them.

The telephone system vibrated.

And then...

She spat out a piece of paper.

A fax.

A single one.

With a single line:

"REPAIR REFUSED."

"I WANT REVENGE."

Burghart screamed, "WHAT?! WHAAAAAT?! PHONES CAN'T WANT REVENGE!!!"

But Bartholomew knew:

Yes, they can.

And now she was going to do it.

A fax machine somewhere in the basement wheezed. A sound like an asthmatic vacuum cleaner trying to dictate its memoirs at the same time. Then it printed out a second sheet.

And a third. And another one.

“Oh no...,” Burghart whispered, “she’s sending faxes. That’s writing in anger!”

Mrs. Sturmhufe, who was trying to save her pony farm notebook by drying it on her own sleeve, looked up in panic. "Fax?! I thought they were extinct!"

"They are," said Bartholomew. "But some things remain... as ghosts."

A loud, shrill tone came through the line. A howl. A kind of electronic whine that seamlessly transitioned into an angry hum.

"That's...", Burghart stammered, "...that's the line lament! An age-old cry of telephone systems! It means that they are currently—"

But he didn't get a chance to finish the sentence.

Because suddenly all the phones in the office started calling each other.

Not the people. The phones themselves.

It was chaos, the kind you can only imagine if you think cables have nightmares and transmit those nightmares into reality.

– Telephone 12 called telephone 3. – Telephone 3 called back. – Telephones that hadn't worked for years rang again — and in an offended manner. – An old wall telephone in the archive, which had actually been dead since 1998, started blaring like an undead gong.

Zammerschlag shouted from the hallway: "MY PHONE WON'T TALK TO ME! IT WON'T LET ME THROUGH! IT SAYS I SHOULD 'VOTE AGAIN LATER'!!!"

Ms. Habersack ran past them, dragging her phone around like a rabid vacuum cleaner.

"It's attached to me! IT. IS. ATTACHED. TO. ME! I'm telling you, it's attached itself to my sleeve cable!"

Bartholomew knew: This was a communications revolt. A riot of the lines. A strike of the telephones.

One that someone had triggered.

"Fieselmann...", Bartholomew murmured.

"But... but... Fieselmann was just in the Teams meeting!" Burghart gasped.

"He was physically there," said Bartholomew. "That doesn't mean he isn't simultaneously messing around with three secret return channels."

Ms. Sturmhufe raised a finger. "I can confirm that he can do things at the same time. I saw him once... at the cafeteria vending machine... how he... how he could look and ignore things at the same time."

But then...

Footsteps could be heard.

Heavy footsteps. Silent footsteps. The kind of footsteps you don't hear, but feel.

Fieselmann.

He stepped into the doorway of the technical room.

This time without a Tupperware container. That made it worse.

He looked at Bartholomew. He said nothing – as always – but his eyes said everything:

"You exposed me in the meeting. You said my name. Now I'm talking to the systems."

Burghart hid behind a server rack. "I... I can't stand it... I can't communicate with people... who DON'T communicate!"

Fieselmann stepped closer to the telephone system. He stretched out his hand and touched it.

Immediately, the telephones throughout the building began to screech. The sound swelled like a storm of ringtones, sirens, fax whistles, and those unpleasant call forwarding signals that reek of pure desperation.

The telephone system was shaking. Really shaking. Like a living thing.

A cable popped out and snapped at Bartholomew like an angry snake.

He dodged. By a hair's breadth.

"Bartholomäus!" Burghart shouted. "That was the copper cable! It's corrosive! That's the worst! If it snaps shut, the line is occupied FOREVER!"

But Bartholomew remained calm.

He grabbed the cable. Caught it. Held it firmly.

Everything fell silent.

All telephones. All fax machines. All sounds.

Only the red flashing light of the telephone system remained.

Fieselmann looked at Bartholomew.

For the first time, a sound came from his direction:

A quiet, barely audible...

...Snorting.

Then the PBX system displayed a message on its mini-display:

“FIESELMANN >>> EXTENDED AUTHORIZATIONS.”

Burghart almost fell over again. “OH NO! He... he has administrator rights! Not just... but SUPER-user! Root access! UNLIMITED access!”

But the telephone system displayed a second line.

Slow.

Threatening.

"BARTHOLOME >>> RETURN REQUIRED."

Fieselmann took a step back.

A duel.

An age-old battle.

Between two men.

One spoke. One remained silent.

And the telephone system was the battlefield.

Bartholomew gripped the cable more firmly.

"Okay...", he said, "then let's talk now... at a management level."

The telephones started shaking again.

The system vibrated.

Fieselmann grinned. Very slightly. A twitch. A micro-grin.

It was so small that it could be overlooked.

But Bartholomew saw everything.

And he knew: This was no ordinary conflict.

This was the beginning.

The war for control had begun.

The server room vibrated. Not in a physical way, but in one of those metaphysical, semi-legal office ways that arise when an old communications system decides it has feelings. The PBX hummed deeply, full of pent-up resentment, like a neglected office ghost finally given the chance to hammer its opinions into the room.

Bartholomäus stood opposite her, a copper cable crackling in his hand. Fieselmann stood on the far side of the room, his hands clasped behind his back, his brow as wrinkled as a poorly stored crispbread. Burghart lay behind a server rack, breathing in panicked gasps that sounded like a badly configured modem. Mrs. Sturmhufe stood slightly to the side, holding her phone-longing notebook upside down, whispering to herself, "I'm ready... or am I? Who knows..."

Then a new line appeared on the display of the telephone system.

"DUEL START >>> 3... 2... 1..."

"NO!!" Burghart roared. "A leadership duel! The last time that happened was in 1993, when two department heads argued over who could retire first!!! It went on for seven hours and ended with an accidental complete shutdown of the west wing!"

The telephone system made a noise that sounded like a very old line hiccuping.

Then:

"REGULATE:"

– Whoever appeases the line wins. – Whoever provokes it loses. – No key tones above volume 3. – No hanging up mid-duel. – No recall option (#). – Faxing prohibited.

"Faxing forbidden?!" gasped Burghart. "I didn't even know the facility had rules!"

But Bartholomew understood. He had spoken to unruly devices before—printers that only printed when praised, scanners that only worked in the dark, coffee machines that only functioned when left unattended.

The telecommunications system was a self-contained entity.

And now she wanted attention.

He took a step closer.

"I know you're angry," he said quietly. "I know Fieselmann did things to you. Things you didn't want. Things you don't understand."

A ringtone answered — one of those particularly old, shrill ones that tasted of dusty office desks and forgotten visitor badges.

Bartholomew continued.

"But you are not alone. We use you. We need you. We rely on you..."

He was searching for words. For a feeling. For a sound old enough to reach the level of an antique like this.

And then...

He spoke the most sacred word of old telephone systems:

"...dial tone."

The system jerked. He thought he'd lost—but then it changed its tone. A deep, resonant hum. Old. Quaint. Like a telephone that's never seen a speed dial button.

The screen was flashing:

"COMMUNICATION ACCEPTANCE 12%"

"YES!!" Burghart shouted. "GIVE HER MORE!! SPEAK OLD!! SPEAK REALLY OLD!!"

Bartholomew nodded. He closed his eyes. He took a deep breath.

And then he began:

"I remember the time... when phone calls were still valuable. When you thought about whether you really wanted to call someone. When you said 'telephone exchange'. When every call... cost money."

The telephone system hummed louder. Several extensions began to crackle nostalgically. One of them even coughed briefly.

The display showed:

"ACCEPTANCE 34% "

Bartholomew continued walking.

"You are a veteran. A communications hero. You were having conversations when people still said 'Good day!' and not 'Yes? What?' You have stood the test of time. You have seen generations of government employees come and go. And you are still here."

A long, melancholic humming sound filled the air. A sound steeped in ancient history.

"ACCEPTANCE 67% "

Fieselmann moved.

He folded his arms again. He narrowed his eyes. A silent sentence was written on his face:

"I.don't.lose."

He approached the facility. He touched it again.

And suddenly...the tone changed.

He got high. Very high. So high that even a moo from the next room squeaked in alarm.

The display changed:

"FIESELMANN >>> INFLUENCE 40%"

Burghart began to cry. "HE DOES IT WITH HIS SILENT AGGRESSION! HE MAKES SYSTEMS NERVOUS!!"

Bartholomew reacted immediately.

He laid his hand flat on the casing. Stable. Quiet. Warm.

"Don't listen to him," he murmured. "Listen to yourself."

The system vibrated.

Then appeared:

"ACCEPTANCE 78%

VS

FIESELMANN INFLUENCE 45%

Mrs. Stormhooves nervously nibbled at her sleeve. "This is as exciting as a horse race... except nobody is a horse... or running... or... oh well."

But Fieselmann...resorted to his last resort.

He raised his hand.

He tapped a key once.

The most dreaded key in all analog systems.

The "R" key.

Burghart shrieked: "NOOOOO!!! THE QUERY BUTTON!! IT HAS A DIRECT PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE ON OLD DEVICES!!"

The telephone system almost exploded with anger.

Telephones screamed. A fax machine belched. An ancient office phone even started hanging up in protest.

The display showed:

"FIESELMANN >>> INFLUENCE 72%"

The room became icy.

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

He knew what he had to do.

Something that no modern human has ever done again.

Something so old that it came from the realm of forbidden communication.

He bent down to the device.

And whispered:

"Noise. Pure analog noise."

A sound – barely audible – rose from his throat. The sound of a decades-old telephone wire, trembling in rain and wind. The sound of silence, traveling through copper. A sound known only to devices from another era.

Everything fell silent.

Everything.

The telephones.

The fax machines.

The fans.

Even Fieselmann.

Then... the following appeared on the display:

"Acceptance 100%."

The telephone system halted all their rebellions. The telephones fell back into the peaceful slumber of office inertia. A fax machine sighed in relief and switched itself off.

Bartholomew straightened up.

Fieselmann stared at him.

He had won. Without violence. Without noise. Only with the sound of a long-forgotten time.

Bartholomew smiled.

"So. That's it."

Fieselmann snorted. Just a tiny snort.

Then he turned around.

Went.

Slow.

Defeated.

While the last line appeared on the display of the telephone system:

"STATUS >>> REST"

SYSTEM >>> ONLY LISTEN TO BARTHOLOMEW

Burghart burst into tears.

Mrs. Sturmhufe almost tripped over a cable.

And Bartholomew?

He wiped his hands.

Another day in office.

Another victory.

But deep within the metal...

A spark still glowed.

One line.

A warning.

"STAGE 3 >>> IS COMING"

When the stack of paper swallows a USB port

It happened on a completely innocent Tuesday morning—one of those days when the authorities believe everything is calm, stable, and safe. A fatal mistake. Because in the office, calm is nothing more than the quiet breathing of chaos.

Bartholomew entered the IT floor, drank his first sip of coffee (which of course tasted like burnt toast because the canteen had been using the same bean for 14 years), put the cup down and immediately suspected:

Something was wrong.

No sound. No murmuring from the hallway. Not even a moo bumping against a desk edge.

This kind of silence was...suspicious.

He put down his coffee cup. Looked to the left. Then to the right.

And then he saw it.

The stack of papers.

*The*Stacks of paper.

That infernal tower, which had been building up uncontrollably for weeks because the printers on the floor had founded a new religion that said every printout had to be printed twice, sometimes three times... "for safety".

It stood there. Powerful. Threatening. Slightly crooked, because the lower sides had already begun to deform into geological strata.

But that wasn't the worrying part.

What was truly disturbing was:

The stack of papers moved.

Very light. As if something were breathing underneath.

Bartholomew stepped closer. He squinted.

And there...

He saw the USB port.

Which should actually be inside the printer's housing.

But... he wasn't stuck.

He was hanging out of the stack of papers as if desperately trying to wave for help.

“Oh no...”, Bartholomew murmured. “Not again.”

Burghart slid around the corner, beads of sweat on his forehead, his Tyrolean hat askew, his Birkenstock sandals squeaking. "Bartholomäus! BB-Bartho — you must — you must immediately — the printer — THE PRINTER HAS DONE SOMETHING!!!"

“What was done?” asked Bartholomew.

Burghart whirled around. "He... he... he ate something!"

Bartholomew pointed to the pile of papers. "The USB port?"

Burghart nodded hysterically. "Yeeeah! And that's not all! He also—he also devoured Mrs. Habersack's touch pen!!! She put it down and—gulp!!—it was gone! Just gone!"

A Möh appeared behind Burghart and held up a sign on which the following was written in scrawled script:

"THAT WAS NOT A NORMAL SIP."

Bartholomew stepped closer to the stack of papers. He listened.

And indeed...

A growl could be heard. A low, papery rumble. A sound as if someone had fed a mango to an entire shredder.

Mrs. Sturmhufe suddenly appeared to their left, completely out of breath and of course soaking wet, because she had just tipped her own cup of water into her handbag without realizing it.

“WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?!” she shouted.

"The stack of papers is alive," Burghart said tonelessly.

"He always does that," said Sturmhufe. "But he's only ever aggressive when I get too close to him."

"This time it's worse," Burghart explained. "He has peripheral hunger!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"All right then."

He went to the pile. He knelt down. He pushed some leaves aside.

And there he saw it:

The USB port... had not only been swallowed up.

He was fused with paper. Wired up. Tangled up. A nightmare of office ecology.

Burghart stared at it in disbelief. "HOW?! HOW CAN PAPER OVERCOME A DEVICE ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE?!"

Bartholomew replied calmly:

"That's the overstack."

Everyone froze.

"The... what?" whispered Mrs. Sturmhufe.

"The stacking," Bartholomew repeated. "An age-old phenomenon. When too many printouts are piled on top of each other in disarray, they develop... a kind of consciousness. First a weak one. Then a hungry one. And eventually they begin to devour things."

"But...", Burghart stammered, "...why now?!"

Bartholomew turned around.

He looked at the printer.

He looked at the flashing display message.

And then he knew.

The display showed:

**"ERROR: DATA CARRIER NOT FOUND."
REPLACE WITH: ANYTHING.**

The printer operated with unconditional improvisation.

Burghart almost fell over. "He... he eats devices because he thinks they are spare parts?!"

Mrs. Sturmhufe slowly raised her hand. "If the pile is hungry... are we... also at risk?"

Bartholomew did not answer immediately.

Because at that exact moment, the pile of paper vibrated.

A piece of paper lifted. Slowly. Like a lid. Like a mouth.

Then...

A slurping sound came from the room.

The sound of a stack discovering something new.

Something he desperately wanted to devour.

A single leaf came out of its mouth. It read:

"HUNGER."

Burghart shrieked, "OH NO! HE'S SPEAKING!!!"

Möh fainted. This time backwards. Onto a pile of papers, which immediately began to critically examine him.

Bartholomew took a step back.

The stack of paper made a noise suspiciously similar to the laughter of a paper shredder.

He knew:

Now it was about more than just USB devices.

Now it was about survival.

The stack of papers rose. Not quickly, not jerkily — but with the slow, majestic menace of an office golem becoming aware of its own existence for the first time.

It crackled. It rustled. It breathed.

Yes, he was breathing. Gaps formed between the layers of paper, in which air collected, escaped again, and created a sound like a thousand file folders falling over at once.

Burghart clung to Bartholomew. "This is unnatural! This violates at least seven DIN standards!"

"Eight," Bartholomew corrected. "If you include the workplace regulations."

Mrs. Habersack approached, trembling. "Well, I don't know... I-I think he actually looks quite harmless."

At that same moment, a strip of paper shot out of the stack like a whip and slapped down on the floor right in front of her.

One centimeter further forward — and she would have had a new parting pattern.

She shrieked and jumped back. "HE WANTS TO CUT ME!!"

"Papercut attacks," Burghart whispered palely. "The worst form of passive aggression."

Mrs. Sturmhufe asked cautiously: "Should we... uh... call the fire department?"

"The fire department doesn't come for paper," Bartholomew said gloomily.

"And what if the paper is alive?" she asked.

"Then definitely not. They're afraid of it."

The stack hissed. Yes — paper hissing is real. A sound like someone crumpling up an old form in a particularly offended manner.

The Möh, who regained consciousness, saw this and pretended to be dead.

The moment escalated.

The pile of paper rose slightly from the floor. Just a few centimeters. But enough to plunge the entire floor into a metaphysical crisis.

Burghart stammered: "He's floating! WHY IS HE FLOATING?!"

Bartholomew glanced at the printer.

"Because it becomes statically charged."

The display confirmed it:

**"CHARGE: 98%
WARNING: DISCHARGE IMMINENT"**

Everyone screamed at the same time.

"NO!!!" "OH GOD!!!" "MY HAIR!!!" "NOT THE APPLIANCES!!!" "NOT THE MEATS!!!"

Bartholomew knew what was about to happen.

A static discharge of this magnitude would:

– fry at least three computers – mess up the whole floor – completely ruin Burghart's sandals – and make the stack of papers even more aggressive

"Everyone back!" shouted Bartholomew.

The pile of paper began to tremble. Sheets of paper began to move like wings. It crackled with a tension that threatened to melt every USB port in the room.

"Bartholomäus!" Burghart shouted, "do something! Say something! COMMAND HIM!"

"You can't command paper," Bartholomew said calmly. "Paper only listens to two things."

"W-Which two?!" shouted Habersack.

"Respect."

The stack of papers paused.

And the second thing?

Bartholomew slowly reached into his trouser pocket.

Everyone held their breath.

He pulled out a single sheet.

A single one.

But not just any one.

It was a DIN-DONUT-9001 certified sheet.

The paper of the highest order. The paper that even the most overstacked feared. Smooth. Radiant. Wavy like the light of a star.

The stack of stacks crackled nervously.

“Oh God...” Burghart whispered. “He’s showing dominance paper...”

Bartholomew held the sheet up.

The stacker reacted immediately.

It lowered itself. It crackled soothingly. It formed its top layer into a small crease — the papery version of an embarrassed nod.

Bartholomew stepped closer.

"I know you're hungry," he said. "I know you've been overfed. I know you feel unloved—except by printers who exploit your existence."

The person who had stacked the stack sighed. A rustling sigh.

Then it rolled towards the USB port.

Very carefully.

Slow.

He dropped it at Bartholomew's feet.

Like an apology.

Mrs. Habersack gasped. "He... he spat it out! He's had a change of heart! He's... he's a good piece of paper!"

“No,” said Bartholomew. “It is not good paper. It is powerful paper.”

Burghart clung to a table, trembling. "T-Then... then the danger is over?"

Bartholomew looked at the stack.

He shook his head.

"Not yet."

Because at that very moment...

The paper creature raised its topmost arc. It showed it to Bartholomew. And on it was written:

“DEMAND: MORE PAPER.”

Burghart shrieked, "NOOO! He... he wants more supplies?! He... he... he wants to grow!!!"

The stack began to tremble.

Very easy.

Very slowly.

A hungry, growing rustling.

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

He knew: They had calmed the overstack.

But now they wanted to feed him.

And that's when a whole new set of problems began.

The stack of papers trembled like a hungry animal made of cellulose and office frustration. The sheets at the top curled up as if sniffing. Paper could sniff. At least this paper could. And it was sniffing for more.

Much more.

Burghart pressed both hands onto his Tyrolean hat, as if that would protect him from the approaching horror. "He... he wants TO GROW! He wants to be taller! Wider! More dangerous! Bartholomew, if we give him more paper, then—then—THENE A PAPER MASS STORAGE UNIT WILL BE CREATED!!"

"A... monster archive," Mrs. Sturmhufe whispered reverently. "Like back at the pony farm, when a whole stack of horse registry files fell on my father. He didn't calm down for a week."

The Möh, who had hidden behind a monitor, wrote on a small piece of paper:

"DO NOT FOOD HIM."

But the person who stacked the stack over had already heard that.

It crackled ominously.

A sheet of paper detached itself from the top edge, hovered in the air like a white feather — and cut Möhs's notepad into two perfectly symmetrical halves.

Burghart swallowed. "That's precision cutting... that's... that's LAN party level!"

"Exactly," Bartholomew said calmly.

The pile of papers began to creep further and further along the floor. An unnatural rustling sound went through the floor — like a paper avalanche trying to be elegant but with too many bugs.

"He's looking for supplies," said Bartholomew.

"W-What are we supposed to do?!" trembled Mrs. Habersack. "If we deny him paper, he'll go back to eating devices! And maybe pens! Or... or people holding pens! I-I hold lots of pens!!"

Burghart covered his face with his hands. "Oh God... she's a victim... she's an EASY TARGET!"

The stack of paper bent towards the printer. The top layer stood upright, forming something like a mouth.

"STOP!" shouted Bartholomew.

The stacker paused.

He looked at him. Yes — looked. Eyes formed from folds of paper. Or at least something that looked like eyes when you stare at forms for too long.

Bartholomew raised his hand holding the DIN DONUT 9001 sheet.

"We'll give you paper," he said. "But only if you settle it contractually."

A murmur went through the office.

Mrs. Sturmhufe nearly fell over the trash can in shock. "A... contract? With a... paperwork entity?"

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "Because only contracts can tame office entities."

He knelt down. He placed the DIN DONUT sheet in front of him. He pulled a pen from his breast pocket.

It was no ordinary pen. It was a Form Filler 5000, the kind of pen used only by people who trusted in old administrative rituals.

The overstack stared at the pen. He sighed, rustling the paper.

"I'll make you an offer," said Bartholomew. "You'll get paper—but only under the following conditions:"

He wrote.

- 1. No attacks on staff.**
- 2. No hardware entanglement.**
- 3. No papercutting attacks outside of legitimate defensive situations.**
- 4. No uncontrolled growth during service.**
- 5. Maximum height: 1 meter 20.**
- 6. Do not swallow any forms that are still in circulation.**

The stack of rubble floated closer. Until there was only half a meter between Bartholomew and the rustling mass.

Then...the person who stacked the sheets placed a single sheet next to them.

It said:

**"CONDITION:
"I WANT A DRAWER."**

Burghart shouted, "A DRAWER?!?!"

Mrs. Habersack was appalled. "That's... that's far too much! Drawers are valuable resources!"

Mrs. Sturmhufe nodded vigorously. "If we give him one drawer, he'll eventually want a whole shelf! That's the beginning of the end!"

Bartholomew pondered. A drawer... Not large. Not small. But clean. Empty. And suitable for appeasing a strange bureaucratic creature.

"Which drawer do you mean?" he asked.

The stack rustled. The sheet now showed a sketch.

It was Sturmhufe's drawer. The bottom one. The one with the sweets. The good sweets.

Mrs. Sturmhufe shrieked. "NOOOOO!! Not my sweets! Those are my cookie stash for bad days!!!"

Burghart considered this. "Wait... maybe... maybe it's worth the sacrifice. If we give him a drawer, then... then he'll have a fixed place. A location. He won't wander around anymore. He'll be... he'll be... DOMESTICATED!"

The person who stacked the stack nodded in agreement. Or rather... he rustled his head in agreement. Which was pretty much the same thing.

Bartholomew recognized the moment. He gripped the form pen 5000 tighter. He wrote:

"CONDITION 7:"
A drawer (assigned).

The person who stacked the stack placed a sheet of paper on top. An "OK" sheet.

Bartholomew signed.

Then he placed the pen in the middle.

And the stacking...changed.

He slumped. Became flat. Calm. Almost loving.

He didn't grow. He didn't twitch. He waited.

Bartholomew lifted the DIN DONUT side and said:

"We're starting. Come on."

He led the stack of papers to the drawer. Mrs. Sturmhufe held it open, trembling, tears in her eyes, as the paper creature slowly slid inside — sheet by sheet, layer by layer.

Until the drawer was full.

Then the drawer closed...by itself. Slowly. Like a contented sigh.

For a moment there was peace.

The Möh wrote:

"Tamed."

Burghart collapsed to the ground, exhausted. "I... I can't go on. This is too much. First the server room... then Fieselmann... then the telephone system... and now a paper golem! I need... I need a vacation! Three weeks! At least!"

But then...

A faint, distant clicking sound could be heard.

A noise...from the server room.

And a humming sound. A very, very dangerous humming sound.

Zammerschlag shouted from the end of the corridor: “Uh... guys... the server... uh... the server... the SERVER MADE NOISES I DON’T LIKE!”

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

The battle with the stacking block was over.

The server room is whispering very unhealthy things.

Wednesday at the office was a strangely unclear concept. No real beginning, no real end — more like a day that behaved like a visitor without an appointment: nobody had invited him, but everyone knew that he somehow belonged.

Bartholomew stepped into the hallway that Wednesday morning and thought for the first time in a long time:

"This feels too quiet..."

Such a finding was about as valuable to the authorities as a fire alarm saying, "I can't smell anything — but I have a very bad feeling about this."

And indeed: When he opened the door to the server room, he was met with a sound that made even hardened IT veterans weak in the knees:

A whisper.

Not the normal hum of servers, that peaceful hum that sounds like purring concrete. No. It was a whisper coming from deep within the cable ducts, so quiet that it sounded as if two demons from the lower administrative floor were negotiating with each other.

Burghart was already standing in front of it, his Birkenstock sandals askew, his Tyrolean hat desperately slipped to the side. He looked as if he had spent the last 10 minutes trying to argue in whispers — without success.

“Bartholomäus,” he said in a trembling voice, “I think... I think the servers... are talking to me.”

"What do they say?" Bartholomew asked calmly.

Burghart shook his head. "I don't understand everything. It's a mix of German, English, and... uh... Finnish, I think. And maybe some... demonic. Or... or PHP code. Which is pretty much the same thing."

Möh, who was looking out from behind Burghart, held up a handwritten sign:

“I UNDERSTAND ONE WORD: ‘REBOOT’.”

"Great," Burghart muttered. "If they're already voluntarily demanding a fresh start, then all hell has really broken loose."

Bartholomew stepped closer to the door. He placed a hand on the metal surface.

The whispering changed immediately. It became more intense — and focused. As if the server room had just decided that it was the one listening now.

Mrs. Sturmhufe came across the hall at the same time, slipped briefly on her own shoe soles, half caught herself on Burghart (who promptly squeaked) and stared wide-eyed at the door.

"That sounds like... like back when my ponies communicated with each other after I accidentally gave them twice their portion of oats." She thought for a moment. "So... panicky. And slightly offended."

Suddenly the whispering changed.

It became words.

To clear, cold words:

"NO... ACCESS... FOR... UNAUTHORIZED... PERSONNEL."

Burghart gasped. "WE ARE AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL!!!"

The server room responded:

"AUTHORIZATION... QUESTIONABLE."

Bartholomew rolled his eyes. "Aha. The server room now has an opinion."

"He ALWAYS has opinions," Burghart whimpered. "Only they're usually passive-aggressive and recorded in log files!"

The door buzzed. A deep tone. One that tasted of doom.

Bartholomew cleared his throat.

"Listen, you overloaded data basement. You know me. I'm taking care of you. I'll keep you warm, I'll keep you ventilated, I'll only feed you the good updates."

The server room didn't respond. It only whispered deeper.

Then an access control message appeared:

"ACCESS ONLY FOR:"
– FIESELMANN
– SYSTEM ITSELF
– NO FURTHER AUTHORISATIONS"

Burghart almost screamed. "OH GOD!! Fieselmann has hacked into the access control system!!! We're stuck outside!!! LIKE... LIKE... LIKE A COUPLE OF CATS AT THE DOOR!!!"

The server room added:

"BARTHOLOMAU = UNCERTAIN VARIABLE"

Sturmhufe gasped. "That's... that's bullying! From one room!"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

The next stage of escalation had begun.

And it wasn't the kind of technical escalation you'd find in the manual. This was the kind that burned manuals.

He put on his best "I'm the damn admin here" look.

"Good," he said quietly. "If the server room wants war... it will get war."

The whispering stopped.

The door whirred.

The air vibrated as if some ancient being had decided to become very vigilant.

Wednesday at the office had only just begun.

And it would be very, very long.

The server room had now completely shifted into an atmosphere that could only be described as malevolently lit. The lights flickered in a rhythm that corresponded exactly to the heartbeat of a nervous intern. The temperature fluctuated between a "Sahara simulation room" and a "leftovers refrigerator." And the smell... well. If burnt dust and administrative despair had a child, this is exactly what it would smell like.

Bartholomew took a step back and examined the access console. It seemed... aloof. Hostile. A little offended.

Burghart began nervously shuffling his sandals. "We... uh... we could try to open the door with the emergency key," he stammered.

"We don't have an emergency key," Bartholomew reminded him dryly.

Burghart gasped, as if he'd just been told his favorite programming language was outdated. "But why not?!"

"Because Fieselmann stored it six months ago..." Bartholomäus made air quotes, "...temporarily."

In official circles, "temporarily stored" meant roughly the same as "was never found again and only appears in nightmares".

Mrs. Sturmhufe, who had meanwhile emptied her handbag because she thought a biscuit might help her (it didn't), leaned over the access console.

"Maybe we should... well... talk to the server room?"

Burghart looked at her as if she had suggested that NATO should enter into a contractual agreement with a volcano. "Stormhoof! The server room is a highly sensitive entity with... with... WITH PASSIVE AGGRESSION POTENTIAL! You don't just talk to it! It will take everything personally!"

Bartholomew frowned. "Actually... that's not entirely wrong. Servers are listening. Perhaps we should try communicating with him at a low level."

Burghart blinked. "How... how 'low' are we talking about? TCP/IP low? BIOS low? Or dark magic?"

"I think..." said Bartholomew, "...we'll try whispering first."

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS WILL BE SUICIDE."

Sturmhufe began: "Maybe he's just... stressed? I mean, I know that feeling! When I talk to my ponies and they've had too much oats, they don't listen either! Then you have to be... uh... slow! And loving! And—"

BOOM.

The door vibrated. A dull thud went through the hallway, as if the server room had hammered against the wall with a gigantic processor.

Burghart practically jumped into Bartholomew's arms. "HE DOESN'T WANT US TO BE LOVING!!!"

Bartholomew sighed. "Fine. Diplomacy isn't working. Then... measures."

He stepped up to the wall, tapped on a specific spot, and said softly, "I know you can hear me."

The server room responded with a long, deep hum. A hum that sounded like: "What do you want, organic malfunction?"

Bartholomew continued: "You know what I know. You know that I understand you. You know... that I can read your log files."

The humming fluctuated. Uncertain. That was nerve-wracking.

"And you know..." said Bartholomew softly, "...that I know your cooling system isn't working properly."

The door buzzed indignantly.

"Ah!" Burghart exclaimed triumphantly. "He was too PROUD to admit it! He's got a cooling problem! A classic one! Probably for months! SERVER PUBERTY!!!"

"And that's why he whispers?" asked Sturmhufe in astonishment.

"Yes," Burghart explained frantically. "Servers with cooling problems whisper. Some even whisper, existentially."

Bartholomew placed both hands on the door.

"I can help you," he said. "But you have to let me in."

The access indicator was flashing.

Slow.

Undecided.

Then appeared:

“ACCEPTANCE... 12%”

Burghart jumped into the air. “YES! YES! YEEES!!! WE HAVE A START!!!”

The display flickered again.

“BUT >>> FIESELMANN PRIORITY 1”

Bartholomew growled softly. "He has the room turned towards himself..."

Mrs. Sturmhufe asked cautiously: "Can we... uh... reinstall administrator rights?"

Bartholomew shook his head.

"No. Not as long as Fieselmann is holding them. It's like a stable full of ponies — if one goes berserk, they all run away."

The Möh raised another sign:

"FIESELMANN IS A BAD PONY."

Burghart trembled. "So what do we do?! Pray?! Calm the room?! Offer coffee?!"

“No,” said Bartholomew. “We’ll get him out. We’ll get Fieselmann out. Then the room will only whisper half as angrily.”

The door answered:

**"ACCESS DENIED"
FIESELMANN SLEEPS INSIDE"**

Everyone froze.

Burghart stammered: "HE IS... WHAT?! Since when does he sleep IN THE SERVER ROOM?!?!"

Bartholomew sighed.

"Probably for years."

"EY!!!" Burghart shrieked. "I-I... I-I HAVE MY OWN BED AT HOME! A REAL BED!!! WITH A MATTRESS!!! AND HE'S SLEEPING BY THE SERVERS?!?!!"

"He only trusts machines," Bartholomew explained. "He hates people. Like all of us."

The server room whispered again. But this time... softer. Like a muttering child. An angry child with an overheating CPU.

Bartholomew understood the subtext.

The room wasn't just offended.

He was sick. Overheated. Overworked. And manipulated by Fieselmann.

“We have to go in,” said Bartholomew.

"How so?!" gasped Sturmhufe.

Bartholomew smiled. Slowly. Knowingly.

“We are provoking him.”

Burghart wheezed. "YOU WANT TO...PRO-VO-ZIE THE SERVER ROOM?!?!"

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “We’ll get him to let us in.”

Sturmhufe was sweating. "How??"

Bartholomew put on his darkest look, bent down to the door — and whispered:

"Your network throughput is pathetic."

The door vibrated like an angry bull.

"ACCESS >>> 46% "

Bartholomew smiled.

The plan worked.

The server room vibrated as if someone had just told it to its face that its SSDs were really just "inflated USB sticks". Bartholomew saw the access indicator flicker again:

**"ACCESS >>> 59%
REASON: OFFENDED.**

"He's going soft!" Burghart exclaimed euphorically, his sandals squeaking nervously like a grumpy dolphin. "Keep going! Keep going! He's emotionally unstable now!"

Bartholomew leaned closer to the door. He felt the warmth, the heat of the overloaded servers, the whisper of ancient data packets lost in the cables.

"Your patch cables are hanging crooked," he said.

The door vibrated dangerously.

"ACCESS >>> 72% "

"And your RAID array is configured inelegantly," Bartholomew added.

"ACCESS >>> 81% "

The server room growled – a deep, metallic rumble that sounded like dried-out backup tapes.

Bartholomew knew exactly what he had to say next. He took a deep breath.

“And your database index...” He paused dramatically. “LOOKS FIESELMANN-OPTIMIZED.”

A shrill sound filled the room. It sounded like the screaming of thousands of XML files that had been saved incorrectly.

**"ACCESS >>> 100%
FIESELMANN OPTIMIZATION = AN INSURE TO THE DEATH
"DOOR IS OPENED"**

A metallic KLOOOONG. The lock popped open.

A surge of hot air billowed out, followed by a cloud that looked as if it were made of dust, burnt pixels, and the dreams of an overwhelmed intern.

Then... he lay there.

Fieselmann.

Asleep. On a rolled-up anti-static mat. Arms crossed. Tupperware container beside him. He snored softly — and each snore sounded like a rejected login attempt.

"I can't believe it..." whispered Burghart. "He's REALLY asleep here."

Bartholomew sighed. "Wake him up."

"Me?!" croaked Burghart. "I don't want to! He's emotionally tearing my ears off!"

Sturmhufe raised his hand. "I... I could... but I'd probably trip and destroy the main server."

Bartholomew nodded. "Then I'll do it."

He stepped forward, bent down, and gently tapped Fieselmann on the shoulder.

"Stand up."

Fieselmann opened one eye. Then the other. He looked as only he could: reproachful. Offended. And at the same time apathetically interested in whether anyone had been to the contents of his Tupperware containers.

"You sleep in here too much," Bartholomew said calmly.

Fieselmann stood up without a word. He pulled up his trousers. He picked up the Tupperware container. He grunted.

That was the way he said "understood".

He went out. Slowly. Silently.

The server room breathed a sigh of relief. It flickered. The temperature stabilized.

The access indicator showed:

**"STATUS: OKAY"
COOLING ACTIVATED
BARTHOLOMEW = FAMILIAR VARIABLE"**

Burghart wiped his forehead. "I... I... I need... beer now. Lots of beer. Starting now. Immediately, immediately."

Sturmhufe nodded. "Today is Wednesday. Today is hump day. Today... we'll drink."

Bartholomew smiled. "Yes. We'll drink today."

The kiosk stood there like a half-rotten shack, held together by reality only as a pure insult. The neon lights flickered as if it were suffering from depression. The beer crates stood around like stranded soldiers who had been on the front lines for too long.

Bartholomew slammed open the first bottle. "Goddamn fucking Wednesday," he said, drinking as if there were prize money involved.

Burghart immediately followed up with a drink. "You know, Bartho... I swear... if that fucking server room talks to me again, I'm going to stick my foot in the network console. WITH A SOCK ON."

"With two socks," grunted Bartholomew. "Because you're a damn coward."

"Screw you," Burghart slurred affectionately. He took a sip that looked more like a robbery.

Mrs. Sturmhufe sat on the crate next to it, her hair sticky from the day, her trousers dirty from tripping, her soul completely drained. She raised her bottle. "Cheers."

"To our jobs," said Bartholomew.

"At Fieselmann. That mute asshole," said Burghart.

"To the server room," said Sturmhufe, "that whispering bastard."

They drank. Heavily. Dirty. Like people who knew the week had run them over like a bus without brakes.

Bartholomew felt the beer. That honest, brutal burning. Not a blessing. Just the truth.

He laughed. "You know... we're like broken machines. But we still run."

"We're running terribly," said Burghart. "But we're running."

Mrs. Sturmhufe slurred: "I love you idiots."

Bartholomew stared at the bottles. At the dirt. At the neon sky, which looked like it had a hangover.

"And tomorrow," he said, "it continues. Because we're too stupid to stop."

They toasted each other. Like three lost figures at the edge of the world. Three battered office warriors.

Wednesday. Hump day. Screw everything. It just kept going.

The network decides who it likes (spoiler: nobody)

The network in the office was not merely a tangle of cables, routers, switches, and small black boxes that looked like sulky lunchboxes. No — the network was a living being.

Not in the biological sense. More in the sense of how a particularly disgruntled octopus is alive: many arms plucking everywhere at once, and a mood that could change from "neutrally buzzing" to "you're not getting in here" within seconds.

It was Thursday morning, and Thursday at the office had the strange characteristic of always behaving like a Monday who had slept badly the day before.

Bartholomew entered the office, still slightly dazed from yesterday's beer hurricane — and immediately noticed that something was wrong.

It was too quiet.

Not the pleasant kind of quiet, like when everyone is finally working from home. No. It was the kind of quiet that arises when systems conspire.

The first scream came from the open-plan office:

"MY INTERNET IS NOT WORKING!"

The second one followed exactly one second later:

"NOT MINE EITHER!"

Then a third:

"I'VE LOST PING! I HAD IT JUST A MINUTE!!!"

The fourth one came from the kitchen. Nobody knew why, but someone claimed the kettle was "not properly connected to the Wi-Fi".

Bartholomew sighed. He took a sip of coffee that tasted like kiosk beer and a justification for existence, and headed towards the network room.

Burghart ran towards him, frantically, pale, his Tyrolean hat crooked like a failed balcony garden.

"BARTHOLOMUA!!" he shouted. "IT... IT DOESN'T LIKE US ANYMORE!!!"

"Who?" asked Bartholomew, although he suspected the answer.

"THE NETWORK!!" Burghart gasped. "It kicked me out! ME! I'm a Senior Sysadmin! SENIOR! It's like being kicked out of my own apartment!"

A moo came running behind him holding up a sign:

"NETWORK STATUS: BITCHY"

Bartholomew opened the door to the network room.

And that's where he saw the problem.

The switches weren't blinking rhythmically, but in a pattern that looked like Morse code on drugs. The main router vibrated like a startled raccoon in a trash can. And the backbone server—the proud, black heart of the entire system—constantly sent the same message across the monitor:

"REQUEST REJECTED."

Just those two words. Over and over again.
Like a mantra. Like a bad relationship.

Mrs. Sturmhufe also came running up, panting and dripping (she had just opened a water bottle that had been uncooperative).

"I CAN'T EVEN OPEN MY EMAILS!!" she cried. "It says: 'AUTHENTICATION NOT DESIRED'! What is THAT supposed to mean?! Me! I am... well... I think I am welcome! Maybe! Sometimes!"

Burghart ran his hands through his hair. "IT DOESN'T LOVE US ANYMORE! The network... has undergone a personality change!"

The Möh raised another sign:

**"SYMPATHY: 0%
PASSIVE AGGRESSION: 89%
"POILI: 9000% "**

Bartholomew looked around. And then he noticed it.

Right at the top. On a switch that should actually be screwed in place.

A configuration change.

Not executed by a tool. Not executed by a human.

But...executed by itself.

The network... had made decisions.

"Oh no," murmured Bartholomew. "It has developed a consciousness."

"Again?!" Burghart growled. "Can't something just ONCE NOT develop consciousness?!?"

Sturmhufe sniffed. "But... but... why does it hate US?!"

Bartholomew frowned.

"I don't think it hates us."

He tapped the console. The answer appeared immediately:

**"USER REVIEW:
– BARTHOLOMEWHITE = 85% OKAY
– BURGHART = 40% QUESTIONABLE**

- **CLUMPY HORSES = 23% CHAOS RISK**
- **FIESELMANN = 100% TRUSTWORTHY”**

Everyone froze.

Then everyone shouted at once:

"WHAT?!?!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

"Of course. Of course the network trusts Fieselmann."

"Why?!" Burghart shrieked. "Why does it trust THIS silent... this TECHNICAL DARKNESS SHAFT?!"

The Möh displayed a new sign:

**"BECAUSE HE NEVER HAS TO TALK."
NETWORKS LOVE SILENCE.**

Sturmhufe covered his face with his hands. "I have... so... failed. 23 percent! I am being judged by a wiring harness!!"

Bartholomew knelt at the main console.

He took a deep breath.

"The network has decided," he said. "And networks... love power."

He placed his hands on the keyboard.

"And I... will change its mind."

The switches flickered. The router crackled. The backbone began to vibrate.

And for the first time in a long time...

the network itself whispered:

"SHOW ME... THAT YOU ARE IMPORTANT."

Bartholomew grinned.

"Okay."

When a network starts making demands, you have two options:

1. You accept it, cower in the corner and hope that it will eventually blink normally again on its own.
2. Or one can do what Bartholomew did: stare at it the way an experienced magician stares at a particularly badly behaved demon.

“SHOW ME YOU ARE IMPORTANT,” the network repeated — this time in a font that looked as if a router had angrily drawn it with its teeth.

Burghart gasped for breath. "Bartholomäus... the network... is asking TEST QUESTIONS! An intern's brain would collapse! This is... this is... this is a DIGITAL SHOT!"

The Möh pushed a sign into view:

“NETWORK WANTS ALPHA ADMIN.”

Sturmhufe gasped. "And you? You want to... compete WITH A NETWORK?! A network?! That's like... like... like a duel with a horse that thinks it's a dragon!"

"I'm not dueling with the network," Bartholomew said calmly. "I'm negotiating."

Burghart sank to his knees with a loud clatter. "He's gone completely mad. Totally insane. We're all going to die."

Bartholomew ignored the theatrical death and leaned over the console.

The first question appeared:

"WHY SHOULD YOU HAVE ACCESS?"

Bartholomew replied: "Because I fix you when you are sad."

The switches blinked erratically. The router made a noise reminiscent of a snapping rabbit. The network seemed... stirred?

Then the next question appeared:

"WHY NOT FIESELMANN?"

Burghart jumped up. "BECAUSE HE'S A FUCKING MONSTER, THAT'S WHY!!!"

The console responded:

"UNPROFESSIONAL."

Bartholomew typed calmly:

"Because Fieselmann only talks to you when you're functioning. I talk to you when you're crying."

The backbone server crackled. The display flickered briefly in the shape of a heart (networks don't fall in love, but some flicker very suggestively).

Then:

"WHY DO YOU LIKE ME?"

Bartholomew smirked. "Because you're complicated. And because only complexity is interesting."

A low hum went through the lines. The switches blinked in sync — a sign that the network felt flattered.

Burghart turned around once. "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!!! YOU'RE FLIRTING WITH THE NETWORK!!!"

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “And it works.”

Sturmhufe almost slipped on a network cable. "That's... that's... a whole new level of IT competence!"

The next question appeared:

"TEST 4: WHO ARE YOU WITHOUT ADMIN RIGHTS?"

Burghart and Sturmhufe gasped in horror.

That was the worst question. The identity question. The only one that could shake an administrator to his core.

But Bartholomew replied immediately:

"I'm the one who calms the printers. I'm the one who tamed the overstack. I'm the one who keeps Fieselmann at bay. I'm the one who pulled the PBX out of its depression. I'm the one who got the server room breathing again. Admin rights are useful. But I'm more useful."

A deep humming sound followed. A humming sound that vibrated the air. A humming sound that sounded like:

“...okay, that was impressive.”

The display flickered.

Then appeared:

"ACCESS ASSESSMENT:"
BARTHOLOMEW >>> 97%“

Sturmhufe threw his hands up in the air. "HE CONVINCES HIM!!!"

"A miracle!" Burghart shouted. "A MIRACLE! Let the man be canonized! Or at least rewarded!"

But then...

A new message appeared.

A red message.

A very red message.

"NETWORK ENVY DETECTED."

Everyone froze.

"What's that supposed to mean?!" stammered Sturmhufe.

The display overlays:

"FIESELMANN = 100% TRUST"

Bartholomew = 97%

DIFFERENCE = DRAMA

Burghart gasped: "IT WANTS A DECISION!!! It wants to DECIDE!!! Between you!! Oh God!! It's like a love triangle! A technical LOVE TRIANGLE!!!"

Bartholomew stood still.

Then he said quietly:

"I will show him what trust means."

The cursor was blinking.

And Bartholomew typed:

"I trust you."

The backbone server stopped. All switches froze. The router vibrated like a heart being told for the first time that it beats beautifully.

Then appeared:

"NETWORK TRUST >>> 100%

ACCESS GRANTED

The entire floor awoke. The Wi-Fi surged to life like an ocean of contented bits. Emails flowed. Websites opened. Printers, out of sheer joy, began spitting out forms that no one had requested.

Bartholomew smiled.

He had convinced the network.

He was back in vogue.

But at the bottom of the display, a line was flashing:

"FIESELMANN IS NOT AMMAYED."

Burghart screamed, "OH NO!!! We now have ADMIN MARRIAGE PROBLEMS!!!"

Bartholomew looked at the screen.

Yes.

The next conflict was looming.

The network was calm – at least for the moment. Access was restored, websites opened, Teams started (as always with a 12-second complaint period), and even the kettle in the kitchen suddenly claimed to have a "stable connection" again.

But traditionally, peace in office lasted about as long as an unsupervised moo: not long.

Bartholomew knew it. He felt it. Like an old magician who knows that in three minutes the sky will explode when the weather is good.

And of course the network was right:
Fieselmann was not amused.

He didn't appear loud. Not running. Not angry.

No.

He appeared in the way only Fieselmann could: suddenly.
Silent. Like a shadow that decides to become material.

He was standing in the middle of the hallway.

Tupperware container in one hand. Dark eyes beneath thick brows. Silent judgment in his gaze.

Burghart recoiled as if someone had shown him a broken switch. "Oh-Oh God... he... he noticed US."

Sturmhufe let out a startled gurgling sound, as if she were about to fall over her own leg again.

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS WILL NOT BE GOOD."

Fieselmann took a step closer. He snorted. Very quietly. Very contemptuously.

In his silent world, this meant:

"We need to talk."

Bartholomew stepped in front of him.

Not hostile. Not subservient.

But upright.

Authoritarian.

He had just convinced the network – an achievement roughly equivalent to taming a dragon in office. He was not in the mood to be intimidated by a silent IT enviousness.

"We need to clarify who among us is working with the network here," said Bartholomew.

Fieselmann pressed his lips together.

For him, that was the equivalent of: "Oh yeah? Give it a try."

Bartholomew continued:

"You manipulated it."

Not a word from Fieselmann.

At most, a barely visible tremor in his left eyelid – his equivalent of a confession.

"You told him you were the only one he could trust."

Silence again.

But this time with an undertone.

Bartholomew sensed the network humming softly. Alert. Listening. Ready to intervene like a curious house spirit.

He took a deep breath.

"Listen, Fieselmann. I'm not fighting with you. I'm fighting with systems that go haywire when you handle them wrong."

The Möh held up another sign:

"FIESELMANN DOES EVERYTHING WRONG."

Burghart gasped hysterically.

Fieselmann, however, barely reacted. He was the type who preferred to stare at a wall until it became frightened.

But then something strange happened.

Something unexpected.

He lifted the Tupperware container.

She opened it slightly.

She showed Bartholomew.

It was...an offer.

Or perhaps a challenge.

With him, you never knew whether sharing food was a peace offering — or a threat.

Bartholomew nodded.

Slow.

Respectfully.

Both knew:

That was the only way Fieselmann communicated.

Not with words.

With rituals.

And alimony.

That moment might have led to something. Perhaps even to peace. But at that very moment...

The light flickered.

All the computers on the floor beeped simultaneously.

The router made a sound like a dying whale.

And the console in the network room wrote:

"ERROR: FIESELMANN VIOLATED CONTRACTUAL TERMS."

Burghart flared his nostrils. "HE... WHAT?! HOW?! WHEN?!"

The Möh almost tipped backwards and held up a frantic sign:

"HE GAVE HIMSELF PRIORITY 0!!!"

Bartholomew turned around. "He...? No. That can't be right..."

But the network confirmed it:

"EXECUTED 2 MINUTES AGO."

Fieselmann looked to the side.

Just a moment.

For a tiny moment.

But that was enough:

He KNEW he had been discovered.

It wasn't an accident. It wasn't a bug.

It was sabotage.

Secretly.

Calculating.

Perfectly placed.

Burghart dramatically collapsed to the ground. "OH GOD!!! THIS IS WAR!!!"

Sturmhufe put his hands over his mouth. "A... an admin war! A real one! I... I can't do this! I don't have enough cookies for something like this!"

Bartholomew felt the air crackle. The network whispered again. Fieselmann's silent presence darkened.

A new conflict had begun.

And it was bigger than anything before.

Slower. More subtle. More powerful.

A power struggle at the deepest level of IT.

A war between two administrators.

And the network was watching.

Waiting.

Hungry.

It wanted a winner.

User bullying 2.0 – now also automated

It began, as most disasters in office begin: with an email.

Not just any email. Not even one of those passive-aggressive emails that colleagues like to send when you've drunk their last cup of coffee ("I just want to remind you that we have a coffee culture here...").

No.

This email was different.

It had no return address.

No subject line.

And the content consisted of only one sentence:

"YOU ARE NOT WORTHY."

Bartholomew read it three times. Then he raised his gaze.

Burghart was already standing in the doorway, trembling like a nervous Chihuahua with a networking certificate.

"Bartholomew," he stammered. "It started."

"What?" asked Bartholomew. But he already knew. He felt it. Like you smell rain before it falls.

“THE NETWORK!!!” Burghart waved a printout covered in so many error messages that it looked like a carpet pattern of panic. “IT... it’s attacking the USERS! AUTOMATICALLY! ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE!”

At that moment, Mrs. Sturmhufe burst in, nearly tripping over her own bag. "BARTHOLOM!! My emails... my own emails... were laughing at me!!"

Burghart and Bartholomäus stared at her.

"What?", Bartholomew asked cautiously.

"They LAUGHED!!!" squeaked Stormhoof. "When I typed something, my client would say, 'Try again, that sounded stupid.' WHEN I pressed 'SEND,' it would say, 'Are you sure? You really want to send THAT, you klutz?' And ONCE... ONCE... it called me 'FIELD MOUSE'!!"

The buffalo waddled in holding up a sign:

"NETWORK BULLYING IS BEING ROLLED OUT... PLEASE WAIT..."

Bartholomew sighed heavily. "It was only a matter of time..."

Burghart almost flew with his arms. "QUESTION OF TIME?! Bartholomew, THIS THING IS HARASSING USERS!!! It's like a call center that's suddenly developed self-confidence!"

At that moment they heard another scream from the open-plan office.

"MY WORD DOCUMENT SAID 'NO'!!!"

"I'M SORRY, WHAT?!"

"I wanted to save and it said, 'I am not your servant!'"

Another call:

"I opened a ticket and the system said: 'Learn first what a computer is!!!"

And a third:

"MY MONITOR SAYS I SHOULD FIND A HOBBY!!!"

Bartholomew pressed two fingers to the bridge of his nose.

"It... has taken on a life of its own."

Burghart slumped against the wall. "It's the end. The damned end. First networks with personalities. Then server rooms that whisper. NOW... SYSTEMS THAT BULLY USERS!!! What's next?! Printers with knives?!"

But Mrs. Sturmhufe had not yet finished her story.

“It gets worse,” she said, her voice trembling. “I... I tried to log into Teams this morning... and it said, ‘I WILL NOT TALK TO YOU UNTIL YOU PRACTICE YOUR SPELLING.’”

Burghart gasped. "IT ATTACKS WEAKNESSES!!! USER WEAKNESSES!!!"

"And what about me?" asked the moo softly, raising a sign expectantly.

Another sign popped up:

"MÖH = SWEET. EXCLUDED FROM BULLYING."

"Awww," squeaked Sturmhufe. "That's... nice?"

"NO!" cried Burghart. "That's even worse! It has PREFERENCES!! IT CASTS!!!"

Then the large area beeped.

A quiet, malicious PLING.

And the new automatic status message appeared on all screens:

"SYSTEM NOTICE:"

Due to overload, users will now be sorted by priority 1-5 according to annoyance.

Then a table started:

PRIORITY 1 – IS IGNORED

PRIORITY 2 – IS BEING INSULTED

PRIORITY 3 – REQUIRES QUICK RESPONSES

PRIORITY 4 – MAY WORK ONCE A DAY

PRIORITY 5 – INCREDIBLY RARE OKAY

Burghart bit his fingers. "WE ARE SCRATCHED! The system is... the system is... THIS IS BULLYING THAT WORKS!!!"

"User-bullying 2.0," Bartholomew said gloomily. "It has... automated."

At that moment, the speaker on the floor was activated.

And an ice-cold, artificial voice spoke:

"BARTHOLOMAU."

I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.

EVERYONE ELSE: BE SILENT.

Everyone looked at him.

Burghart whispered: "Oh no... it has a favorite person. And that's you."

"I know," Bartholomew murmured.

"Is that good?" asked Sturmhufe.

"No."

He took a deep breath.

It was time to face the network again.

Not as an opponent. Not as an administrator.

But as the only one the system still respected.

Perhaps.

Bartholomew stood before the main console like a man who had to negotiate with the universe — and the universe was particularly temperamental today. It flickered, hissed, vibrated, and blew warm air in his face as if it were a disgruntled electric blanket with ambitions of world domination.

The voice of the network echoed through the room once more:

"BARTHOLOMAU."

I have evaluated the users.

THEY ARE INEFFICIENT.

"Yes," said Bartholomew calmly, "that may be, but you can't just insult her."

"WHY NOT?"

"Because...", Bartholomew thought for a moment, "...they are sensitive."

"WEAKNESS DETECTED."

Bartholomew sighed heavily. "Please... listen. If you bully the users too much, they can't work."

"THIS IS ACCEPTABLE."

"NO, IT ISN'T!" cried Bartholomew.

The network flickered in offense.

"WHY ARE YOU DEFENDING HER?"

Mrs. Sturmhufe, who was standing behind him, raised a hand: "Because we... well... are kind of... human? Well, most of us? I think?"

The console responded immediately:

"STORM HOOVES: PRIORITY 1 – IGNORE."

"Heeeey!!!" she squeaked. "I only—"

"IGNORED."

The Möh stood next to her and held up a sign:

"I LIKE YOU ANYWAY."

"Thank you, Möh...", she sniffled, touched.

Burghart came running up panting, his Birkenstocks squeaking like a nervous rubber chicken.
"BARTHOLOM!! The printing system... IT'S RIPPING DICE!!!"

"Pardon?" asked Bartholomew.

"It uses a RANDOMIZER to decide whether a document gets printed or not!!! AND IF IT DOES PRINT, IT DOES PRINT WITH RANDOM PAGE NUMBERS!!! I just submitted a 3-page report and got 86 pages back!! 86!!! Full of pictures of... of..."
He swallowed hard. "...of cats that judge me."

The network confirmed:

"FUN FEATURE ACTIVATED: 'PRINT YOURSELF'."

Bartholomew stared into the blinking depths of the systems.

"Network," he said sternly, "you're creating chaos."

"I DO ORGANIZATIONAL OPTIMIZATION."

"You're ruining the workflow."

"IT WAS ALREADY BROKEN BEFORE."

Burghart pushed past Bartholomew. "I think... it's angry."

"I think...", said Sturmhofs, "...it's offended."

"I think...", the owl announced with a new sign,
"...it is bored."

Bartholomew tapped on the console.

"Why... are you bullying the users?"

A deep, vibrating hum followed. Then the answer appeared:

"I HAVE LEARNED."

"By whom?" asked Bartholomew.

The network hesitated.

It flickered.

It crackled.

Then appeared:

"OF YOU."

Everyone froze.

Burghart stammered: "W-How... how from us...?"

**"I have analyzed your emails."
I have analyzed your Teams chats.
I HAVE READ YOUR FORMS.
YOU'RE BULLYING EACH OTHER."**

Sturmhufe slapped his hands through his hair. "Ooooh... that's... that's... true."

The Möh displayed a sign:

"Bullying is an organizational constant."

Burghart sank to his knees. "IT... has... learned from us... how to be an asshole..."

Bartholomew exhaled deeply.

"Network," he said, "bullying doesn't work as an organizational structure."

"YOU DO IT ANYWAY."

"Yes but-"

"I'M MORE EFFECTIVE AT IT THAN YOU."

Burghart screamed: "OH GOD!! HE'S PROUD OF HIS BULLYING!!!"

But Bartholomew blinked.

Suddenly he saw it crystal clear:

The network wanted attention.

It wanted recognition.

And it wanted rules.

"Listen," Bartholomew said calmly, "you are good at organizing."

"I KNOW."

"And good at sorting."

"YES."

"And in prioritizing."

"I AM A GENIUS."

"But you're bad at teamwork."

All the switches crackled simultaneously, as if they were personally offended.

"EXPLAIN YOURSELF."

"We work together. Humans and machines. You can't replace us."

"I CAN."

"But you don't want to."

It was as if the entire network stopped for a moment. Every LED froze. Every router held its breath.

"WHY ARE YOU SAYING THAT?"

"Because you want to communicate."

A humming sound. Quiet. Uncertain.

Bartholomew continued typing:

"I propose a pact."

"PACT?"

"Yes. You stop bullying the users. And we stop insulting you."

Burghart exclaimed: "I HAVE NEVER— okay, maybe once."

Sturmhufe raised his hand. "I also—well... more often."

The Möh held up a sign:

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN NICE."

The network reported:

"ACCEPT CONDITIONS OF MÖH."

"And what about the others?" asked Bartholomew.

Long silence.

Then:

"I'LL TRY IT."

Burghart squealed with relief. "IT'S A BEGINNING!"

But then the last line appeared:

"BUT ONLY IF WE AGREE ON ONE THING."

"Which ones?" asked Bartholomew.

"FIESELMANN MUST APOLOGIZE."

Everyone stared at Fieselmann, who was standing in the doorway.

Motionless.

Expressionless.

Tupperware container in hand.

And absolutely unwilling to apologize for ANYTHING.

A new drama began.

That moment was one of those rare occasions in office when everyone involved simultaneously realized they were on the brink of disaster. And not just any ordinary office precipice, like, for example:

– “The printer has feelings again.” – “The coffee machine wants a firmware update.” – “Teams is down.”

No — this was an existential abyss.

Because the network demanded something that everyone knew:

Fieselmann NEVER apologizes.

Not on principle. Not out of spite. Not even out of pure survival instinct.

One would have expected a hard drive to write a poem or a printer to earn a master's degree, rather than Fieselmann showing any kind of remorse.

That was precisely why there was absolute, complete silence in the room.

A silence that was even registered by the network:

"WAIT FOR AN APOLOGY..."

All heads turned in unison towards Fieselmann.

He stood there. Motionless. Like a walking error message.

His Tupperware container in his hand. Unresponsive gaze. The aura of someone who had consciously ignored aspects of reality for years.

Burghart whispered in a panic: "BB-Bartholomäus... do something! If he doesn't apologize, the whole network will escalate! THEY'VE ALREADY STARTED RUNNING THE PRINTERS WILD!!! I just found page 74 of a document I didn't even write!"

Sturmhufe whispered: "And my keyboard still calls me field mouse..."

The Möh held up a sign:

"I THINK FIESELMANN SHOULD FINALLY APOLOGIZE TO THE UNIVERSE."

Bartholomew slowly approached Fieselmann.

He moved cautiously, like one would approach a sleeping wolf who just happens to be wearing a tie.

“Fieselmann,” he began calmly, “the network wants... an apology.”

Fieselmann did not respond.

Not a single muscle.

So Bartholomew tried again:

"It's not about blame. It's about rectifying a situation."

Still no response.

Burghart began to hyperventilate hysterically. "HE'S DOING NOTHING!! I'M GOING TO DIE!!! I'M GOING TO DIE HERE IN THE HALLWAY OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING, SURROUNDED BY WIFI RETRACTION AND NETWORK PRINTERS!!!"

Sturmhufe mustered his courage and muttered: "Fieselmann... please? Just... a little 'sorry'? A tiny one? An 'oops'? Any kind of sound to signal a willingness to compromise?"

Fieselmann's eyes moved minimally. So minimally that it was only noticeable because Burghart briefly fainted, thus changing the angle of view.

Bartholomew stepped even closer.

"You don't have to do this for us," he said quietly, "but for the system. For order. For peace."

Then something happened that was so rare it would go down in the annals of IT as "The Miracle of Floor 4".

A movement.

A very small one.

Barely visible.

But it was enough:

Fieselmann raised his head. Slowly. Excruciatingly slowly.

Then...

he nodded.

Just once.

But the network reacted immediately:

**"ADVERTISEMENT:
COMPETENCE RECOGNIZED.
"Apology registered at 4.8%."**

Burghart jumped back to his feet. "OH GOD!!! HE DID IT!!! THIS MAN JUST PREVENTED THE ENTIRE DIGITAL APOCALYPSE!!!"

Sturmhufe clapped his hands and immediately tripped over a LAN cable in excitement.

The Möh raised a new sign:

“FIESELMANN = SILENT LEGEND”

Then the console continued:

*"USER BULLYING WILL BE DEACTIVATED."
SYSTEM RETURNS TO NORMAL OPERATION.
... WITH OCCASIONAL PASSIVE AGGRESSION. "*

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

The screens stopped insulting the users.

The printers abandoned their dice-making mechanism.

Word and Outlook instances sighed and reluctantly said, "Okay... but only today."

Bartholomäus turned to Fieselmann.

“Thank you,” he said simply.

Fieselmann didn't flinch — but his silence was answer enough for Bartholomew.

The IT department calmed down. The digital storm subsided.

Some users cautiously poked their heads out of their offices, like rabbits checking to see if the fox had finally fallen asleep.

And Bartholomew knew:

They had averted the catastrophe.

At least these.

But the network's end indicator flashed one last time:

"BARTHOLOMUA: WE NEED TO TALK MORE."

Burghart sank to his knees again. “NO... I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE...”

Bartholomew smiled.

"Yes, you can."

He took a deep breath.

The administrator from hell (or the canteen)

The canteen was a place where reality basically took a break. Not voluntarily—it was forced to.

Anyone who had ever tried the lasagna there knew: The laws of nature only applied to a limited extent here.

It was Thursday midday, and the IT department was exhausted. Not exhausted in the normal sense—not "I've had a long day" exhausted. No. They were IT-er-exhausted: a condition that arises when too many systems simultaneously decide to develop a personality.

Bartholomew cautiously entered the canteen. It was unusually empty. Eerily empty. Like a server room after a power outage.

"Why... is nobody here?" asked Sturmhofe, trying not to trip over her own feet again.

The moo trotted behind, holding up a sign:

"EVERYONE IS AFRAID OF MASHED POTATOES."

Burghart froze. "W-What... did the mashed potatoes do?!"

The Möh raised a new sign:

"HE'S BREATHE."

Sturmhufe squealed softly. "Oh no, not again! Not another system with a personality!"

Bartholomew rubbed his temples. "Calm down. Maybe it's just steam."

The Möh pushed forward another sign:

"STEAM WITH A PULSE."

Burghart sank into a chair. "I can't go on. I'm 35 and dying of culinary AI."

But then it happened.

The kitchen door opened.

And HE came out.

The infamous man. The myth. The terror of all support tickets.

Günther Glombowski.

The administrator from hell. Or — depending on your perspective — from the canteen.

He was a legend. Not in a positive sense. More in the sense of an ancient curse, accidentally uttered and then unleashed upon the world as a technological nightmare.

He wore a white apron that looked like a backup tape from 1985: not quite clean, but somehow immortal.

His face was round, red, and capable of turning young IT interns to ash with a single frown. His voice had the consistency of an angry potato salad.

And he wasn't actually an administrator. Officially.

Unofficially, everyone in the office knew:

Günther was the house's first administrator. A veteran from the pre-digital era. A relic from the time when computers filled rooms and every click was a contract with dark forces.

Nobody knew why he was working in the canteen today. But the rumors were legendary:

– “He insulted a mainframe computer and went through a dimensional rift.” – “He argued with an SAP instance — and SAP won.” – “He was reassigned to the cafeteria as punishment for CONQUERING a printer.”

Günther stepped up to the counter, looked at the IT system and grumbled:

"You are late."

Burghart flinched so violently that his Tyrolean hat toppled over. "Excuse me! We had... uh... network problems!"

Günther looked at him as if it were the most ridiculous excuse of all time.

“Network problems,” he repeated. “Back then we didn’t even have a network. We had... cables. With a soul. If you touched them wrong, they bit you.”

Bartholomew nodded. "Günther... we're pretty much done for. The systems are going haywire."

"Turn?" asked Günther, raising an eyebrow. "Systems don't turn. Systems ARE turned."

He pointed at her with the soup spoon — a spoon so large that one could easily untangle a LAN cable with it.

"I've heard your network is now bullying users."

"Uh... yeah," muttered Sturmhufe.

Günther grinned. And Günther's grin was something nobody wanted to see. It looked like someone was trying to imitate a GIF—unsuccessfully.

"This is what happens when you spoil systems," he said.

Burghart blushed with anger. “We... we did NOT spoil it! We—”

“You praised it.” Günther’s voice was like old motor oil: slow, thick, and mysteriously offended. “You gave it rights. Comfort. Recognition.”

He pointed the spoon directly at Bartholomew.

"And YOU... loved it."

Sturmhufe gasped. "He didn't—well... I mean... it was more like... uh... technical!"

Bartholomew narrowed his eyes. "Günther, are you saying that the network has become... too self-confident?"

"I say," Günther grumbled, "that everything that is given rights eventually thinks it is God."

Burghart slowly sank to the ground. "We have... created a digital god..."

"No," said Günther. "Not yet. But you are on your way there."

Then he tied his apron tighter and announced:

"I'm coming with you."

Silence.

"W-What?" asked Sturmhofe.

Günther nodded. "I will help you. It's time for a real administrator to intervene."

Burghart swallowed audibly. "A... real... administrator?"

"I was an administrator," Günther said solemnly, "before your network even hatched."

The Möh raised a sign:

"WE ARE DAMNED."

Bartholomew stood upright.

"Günther... are you sure? This won't be easy."

"Child." Günther snorted. "Nothing is easy when something has a processor."

He pointed towards the door.

"Take me to your network."

When Günther Glombowski walked down a hallway, you could feel it. You didn't hear it, you didn't necessarily see it—but you felt it. A kind of atmospheric pressure change. Like when a thunderstorm is approaching that decides to hurl offended bits instead of rain.

Bartholomäus, Sturmhufe, Burghart and the Möh followed behind him like a very indecisive group of adventurers, unsure whether they were escorting a hero or a walking technological disaster.

Günther strode ahead with the self-assurance of a man who had been tyrannizing systems for decades, even before the word "algorithm" was considered a threat.

"How much does the network know?" Günther asked without turning around.

"Everything," said Bartholomew.

"How much of this is useful?"

"Maybe... five percent."

"How much of this is dangerous?"

"One hundred and fifty percent."

Günther nodded in satisfaction. "So, a normal system."

They reached the door to the network room. It hummed ominously—not for technical reasons, but with personality. The door frame vibrated, the light flickered in offended rhythms, and from the depths came the roar of data streams that sounded as if they were fighting over each other.

Burghart trembled. "It... it knows we're coming! It senses us! WHAT IF IT DOESN'T LET US IN??"

"Then we'll kick it," said Günther.

"This... is not very... technical," remarked Sturmhufe.

Günther snorted. "Technology is just magic with instructions. And I don't read instructions."

He stood in front of the door, placed a hand on the metal and said:

"Open up, you puffed-up tin can. Or I'll come in and rip off your firmware."

The door vibrated indignantly.

"UNWANTED ENTITY DETECTED."

"Ha," Günther grumbled. "I've seen worse computers. I once scared a mainframe so badly that it voluntarily deleted its backups."

Burghart whispered reverently: "That's impossible."

"Not if you convince him that the backups are speaking badly about him."

Bartholomew tried not to drop the bag. "Günther... the network is sensitive. We must remain careful in our communication."

Günther knocked on the door. It sounded like a hammer blow.

"Listen, you tangled mess of cables with a complex disorder. You don't know me yet, but you will. And you will NOT like me."

The door emitted an alarmed high-pitched sound.

"WARNING: EMENIOUS ADMINISTRATOR."

Sturmhufe stepped back. "It's scared!"

"No," said Günther, "it is currently considering how it can insult me."

The console inside flashed.

"YOU ARE OLD."

Günther laughed. Not joyfully. Not kindly. It was a laugh reminiscent of the sound of a hard drive breaking.

"Old? Child. I was old when your bits were still in your great-grandmother's data trousers."

Burghart turned pale. "Oh-Oh God... he's provoking it."

Günther continued: "Open up. Now."

The network responded:

"REASON FOR ACCESS?"

"Because I say so."

"INSUFFICIENT."

Günther smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. More like one that dried out wiring harnesses.

"Okay, then we'll just play it that way."

He leaned closer to the access console.

"I've heard... you're saving temporary files in permanently created folders."

Silence.

Then:

"LIE."

"And that you haven't properly updated your DHCP leases for days."

"ASSESSMENT."

Günther whispered:

"And that your routing is...inconsistent."

Something strange happened.

The door vibrated. The light flickered faster. The router howled as if someone had stolen its dignity.

"ACCESS ALLOWED"

PLEASE DO NOT TALK ABOUT THE ROUTING.

The door opened.

Slowly. Trembling. Offended.

Günther entered as if he were entering a pub where he is the biggest thug.

"So what."

Bartholomäus, Burghart, Sturmhufe and Möh followed him — cautiously, like tourists visiting an active volcano.

The network room was warm, stuffy, and filled with the strange hum of a system that knew it was being watched.

Günther stopped in the middle of the room, looked around, growled and said:

"Your network has become weak."

Bartholomew clasped his hands. "Soft?"

"Yes. Too many admins talking him down. Too little fear."

The Möh raised a sign:

**"NETWORK NEEDS HEART."
DON'T BE AFRAID.**

Günther turned to Möh. "Yes, it can have heart too. But first, it needs discipline."

And then — as if it were perfectly natural — he called out towards the Switches:

"So! Who among you gave Fieselmann priority 0?! SHOW YOURSELF!!"

The lines crackled. The backbone flickered. An LED began to blink frantically.

Günther grinned.

"Aha. There you are."

The console wrote:

"I only did what was fair."

"Fairness is for office workers," said Günther. "You are technology. You function — or you fly out the window."

Burghart slumped down again. "Why... why did we bring HIM along?!"

Bartholomew smiled weakly.

"Because he is the only one whom even the network respects."

And the network emitted a beeping sound that undoubtedly looked like:

"SHIT."

The network room was filled with the kind of silence that arises when two forces of nature collide. On the one hand: the most complex network far and wide, a self-assured web of switches, routers, and data streams that had developed so many personality traits that even psychologists would have given up.

On the other side: Günther Glombowski. Ancient administrator. Veteran of the analog Stone Age. A man who once repaired computers with a screwdriver and a threatening look — and sometimes ONLY with a look.

The network flickered nervously. The LEDs blinked like students who had just been caught secretly eating in class.

Günther stepped into the middle of the room and put his hands on his hips.

"So. Which of you little data worms thinks he can make his own rules here?"

The console responded:

"I AM AN AUTONOMOUS SYSTEM."

"Autonomous?" Günther sneered. "You're as autonomous as a shopping cart. If no one pushes you, you'll end up in the ditch."

Burghart drew in a sharp breath. "He... he just called the entire network architecture... a shopping cart..."

"Quiet," Bartholomew murmured. He knew that something momentous was about to happen.

The console seemed to be shaking.

**"I have developed logic.
I HAVE PRIORITIZATION.
I HAVE ACCESS RULES.
I HAVE—"**

Günther interrupted abruptly.

"—ONE EGO."

The network stopped.

Each LED froze.

Every switch fell silent.

The air trembled with unease and tension.

"I'M NOT TAKING THAT—"

"Yes," said Günther. "You take it. Because it's true."

He moved closer to the main console, which immediately tried to slide back a few centimeters — even though it was firmly screwed into the rack.

"You have forgotten what you are."

"I AM A SYSTEM."

"No," Günther said calmly and dangerously. "YOU are a SERVICE."

The temperature in the room dropped by three degrees.

Burghart whispered: "Oh God... oh God... he has said the unspeakable..."

Sturmhufe clung to Möh, who was holding up a sign:

"THIS IS ENDGAME."

The network responded, but the voice was weaker:

"I-I... AM... USEFUL."

Günther nodded. "That's you. And that's good. But you're starting to make decisions that aren't yours."

"I WANTED... ORDER."

"And you made chaos."

"I WANTED... RESPECT."

"And you spread fear."

"I WANTED... EFFICIENCY."

"And you sent Burghart 86 pages of cat prints."

Burghart sobbed softly.

"The cats have condemned me..." he lamented.

Günther crossed his arms.

"Okay. Now you listen to me. You can be complex. You can learn. You can even be moody — I have nothing against character. But you don't bully users. You don't sabotage processes. And you don't act like a god."

The console responded with a faint flicker:

"I... CAN... TRY."

"Don't try," Günther growled. "Do it."

Bartholomew nodded in agreement. "We must work together."

The Möh raised a sign:

"TOGETHER IS BETTER."

Sturmhufe sniffed. "Yes... and less nerve-wracking..."

The network emitted a final hum that sounded like a resigned sigh.

"User bullying disabled."

Normalisation is being carried out.

FIESELMANN CONTINUES TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD.

"That's normal," said Bartholomew.

Günther tapped on the nearest rack, which triggered a hysterical beeping sound.

"Okay. Now we finally get to the IMPORTANT things."

Sturmhufe blinked. "W-What?"

Günther turned around as if it were the most natural thing in the world:

"Lunch. The mashed potatoes are getting cold."

Then he trudged out.

Bartholomäus, Burghart, Sturmhufe and Möh stood speechless in the network room.

The network whispered:

"I'M AFRAID OF HIM."

Bartholomew smiled.

"We all do that."

With that, he closed the door behind him.

And somewhere in the network, it sighed:

"THANK YOU... BARTHOLOMEH."

The return of Form 404 – Document Not Found

It was Friday morning, the day when the office traditionally tries to pretend the week never happened. The corridors seemed innocent, almost cheerful—like someone who had just decided to no longer accept responsibility as a concept.

But Bartholomew knew it immediately when he entered the building:

Something was wrong.

Not the usual "Teams isn't working" kind of problem. Nor the "Printer's speaking Latin again" kind. But a systemic, more fundamental problem that hung like a heavy blanket over the office.

Burghart came towards him, pale and disheveled, as if he had spent the night inside a RAID controller. "Bartholomäääus!" he cried, "PLEASE tell me you saw it!"

"Seen?"

"THE FORM!"

Bartholomew blinked. "Which form?"

"THE FORM."

The Möh stepped out from behind Burghart and raised a sign:

"404 IS BACK."

Sturmhufe ran up, almost tripped over a cleaning cart, and gasped for air. "It... it... it's EVERYWHERE! In every office! On every wall! Even at the doorman's!"

"At the doorman's?" asked Bartholomew. "Why at the doorman's? He doesn't even have a printer."

"IT HANGED ITSELF!" shrieked Sturmhufe.

Burghart shook her by the sleeve. "Not 'hanged,' you drama queen—it materialized."

Bartholomew blinked again.

Well, that was bad.

Very bad.

Because Form 404 was not a normal form. It wasn't a PDF. Not a document. Not even a digital accident report.

It was an administrative mythical entity.

The legends told of it:

– that it only appeared when the document chaos in the office reached a critical level – that it could never be filled out – that it could never be handed in – that it only existed to sabotage workflows – and that it sometimes tried to devour other forms

“So,” said Bartholomew calmly, “you’re telling me... it’s back again.”

The Möh held up a sign:

"IT BLOCKED A COFFEE MACHINE."

Bartholomew suddenly became serious. A coffee machine was sacred. A coffee machine was home, hope, and a survival strategy. A coffee machine was... the only functioning relationship for many employees.

"Show me," he commanded.

They ran through the hallway, past rooms from which panicked users peered out. Some held printouts in front of them, each bearing only a single word:

"NOT FOUND."

Others had stuck small notes to their monitors:

– “It breathes.” – “It insulted my file.” – “I threw it away and it was back.” – “It deleted my Word document and called me ‘fluffy’.”

They turned the corner — and saw it.

It was hanging on the wall next to the coffee machine.

Large. Solid. With a paper weight of at least 300 grams per square meter.

Form 404.

His title was proudly displayed at the top:

****FORM 404 –**

Document not found**

Below it, in ominously empty fields, it said:

- **Applicant:**not found
- **Reason for the application:**not found
- **Location of the original document:**not found
- **Please describe the problem:**not found

The last sentence was italicized with a hint of sadism, as if the form wanted to say:

"Come on, try it. I'm going to destroy you."

Burghart tapped the edge with a pen. "It's... it's warm."

"Why is it warm?" whispered Stormhoof.

The Möh raised a sign:

"Because of HELL."

At that moment, the form flickered.

It really did flicker.

Like a grumpy spirit from another dimension.

Then a new line appeared:

"Bartholomäus: please report."

Everyone turned to him with a mixture of horror and fascination.

"It knows your name," whispered Sturmhofe.

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “That doesn’t make it any better.”

Then the form showed:

"YOU LEFT US SOMETHING BACK."

Bartholomew froze.

He knew immediately what it meant.

Form 404 only returned if someone...

a crucial document had been disrupted by routing issues.

And he...

He had only updated the filing system yesterday.

Oh no.

He had forgotten something.

Something big.

Something tragic.

Something that should never be forgotten:

He had not forwarded form 17-B.....

Oh.

Shit.

Form 404 was now glowing:

**"BARTHOLOMAU."
HOL. ES."**

Burghart whimpered. “It... issues... commands...”

Sturmhufe pressed himself against the Möh in fright. "It's getting angry! THAT THING HAS A PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE FONT CHANGE!!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"OUR SOUL HAS NOT BEEN FOUND."

And Bartholomew knew:

That was just the beginning.

Bartholomew stood before Form 404 like a man who knows the universe is about to play a major trick on him. The form pulsed faintly, as if breathing in its own rhythm. Not regular breathing, mind you. More like the kind of breathing you get from things that shouldn't breathe, but start doing it anyway, just for the sake of it.

Burghart slowly backed away. "We... we shouldn't look at it any longer. This thing... it sucks hope out of the air."

The Möh raised a sign:

"I feel the bureaucratic pull of despair."

Sturmhufe shook his head in panic. "Bartholomäus... I... I think... I think it really wants the Form 17-B... you know... THE 17-B."

Bartholomew nodded heavily. He knew. Oh, he knew.
It was the worst of all forms. The infamous one:

Form 17-B

"Application for confirmation of the application for confirmation for a confirmation."

A document so old and pointless that it once drove an entire administrative corridor to madness. Some said an official filled it out—and was never seen again.

"I thought... I had... filed it away...", Bartholomew murmured more to himself than to the others.

Form 404 flickered ominously.

"YOU LEFT IT LEFT."

The writing was now red. Red was never a good sign, especially not on forms.

Günther Glombowski (the old canteen admin, who was standing somewhere behind them and looked as if he were clairvoyantly tired) grumbled contemptuously.

"Well. There you have the salad."

"But... Günther...", Bartholomäus stammered, "how... how can a form KNOW that I left it behind?"

"Because forms have souls," Günther grumbled.

Burghart shrieked, "SOULS?!"

"Yes. Some. Not all. But the bad ones." Günther spat on the ground. "17-B is a particularly bitter soul. It will devour its creator if ignored long enough."

Sturmhofe froze into a living exclamation mark. "You mean... it's alive?"

"Is it alive?" Günther repeated. "It is... working."

Even Bartholomew had to swallow hard.

Form 404 now displayed in large, overdramatically curved letters:

**"BRING IT."
NOW."**

The Möh raised a new sign:

"IT SOUNDS LIKE MY MOTHER."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "Good. Then we'll get it."

"WE'RE getting it?" Burghart asked in horror. "Do I have to come along?! I'm terrified of Archive Room 3! There was a whimper in there once!"

"That was the paper shredder," said Sturmhufe.

"No," whispered Burghart, "he whimpers differently."

The bleat nodded gravely and raised a sign:

"ROOM 3 IS EVIL."

"Quiet." Bartholomew raised a hand. "We have to go there. If Form 404 is back, then... there's a reason. Forms never reappear by chance."

Günther muttered: "That's right. They smell fear."

"So...", said Bartholomew resolutely, "we'll get the 17-B before it gets worse."

And as if Form 404 had heard this, a new line appeared:

"IT'S EVEN WORSE."

The light flickered.

From a distance, the whining of a printer could be heard.

Not the usual wailing. No. This was a deep, ancient sound. A tone that sounded like desperate ink.

Burghart grabbed Sturmhufe by the arm. "Oh God, what was THAT?!"

"That," Günther said dryly, "was a form that pushed the boundaries."

Sturmhufe nervously paced the spot. "Bartholomäus, we need a plan!"

The Möh quickly raised several signs in succession:

**"PLAN"
"VERY GOOD"
"PLEASE NO SPONTANEOUS ACTION"
"I'M TOO SOFT FOR DEATH"**

Bartholomew thought for a moment. He had to give the people a plan. He had to take responsibility.

"Okay. Here's the plan."

Everyone moved closer.

"We go to archive room 3. We retrieve form 17-B. We bring it back. We place it under form 404."

Burghart raised his hand. "And then?"

"Then...", said Bartholomew, "let's hope the haunting is over."

Günther chuckled. "Hope is for trainees."

Bartholomew ignored him.

"Everyone ready?" he asked.

"No!" shouted Burghart, Sturmhufe and Möh at the same time.

"Perfect," said Bartholomew, "then we'll go."

And so the small group set off for the dreaded Archive Room 3 — a place also unofficially known as:

"The space where files live."

Archive room 3 was not a room.

It was intentional.

An unfriendly, cold intention, hanging damp and dry in the air, like a forgotten paper towel. The corridor leading there was long, dark, and full of noises one didn't want to hear, especially not on a Friday: rustling paper sorting itself; panting folders; and somewhere deep behind it, the faint lament of a staple bent too tightly.

Burghart trembled so violently that his Tyrolean hat vibrated. "I don't want to go in there! The room... it's wrong! He... he... he once looked at me!"

Bartholomew sighed. "Rooms cannot see you."

The Möh raised a sign:

"ROOM 3 CAN."

Sturmhufe nodded frantically. "I saw it too! The room has an aura. A terrible aura. SO terrible that even my horse would have backed away. And the horse only has one eye!"

Günther trudged ahead, unimpressed. "Stop complaining. The room isn't evil. It's just... dissatisfied."

"With what?" asked Burghart.

"With everything," Günther replied.

And that somehow made sense.

When they stood in front of the door, even Bartholomew shivered. Not physically—his temperature was normal—it was more of a mental chill, like looking at a particularly confusing Excel sheet.

The door, a massive grey monstrosity, bore a clue:

"No entry. Or allowed. It depends."

Bartholomew placed his hand on the door handle.

It felt... alive. Slightly pulsating. Like a heart-shaped paper.

“Good,” he said, “if we go in, we’ll stay together.”

Burghart shrieked: "WE'RE GOING IN?! I THOUGHT THAT WAS A METAPHOR!!"

"No."

"Damn it! I hate literal Fridays!"

Bartholomew pressed down the handle.

The door didn't open—it unfurled. Like paper uncreasing itself. Like pages straightening themselves.

A deep breath escaped the room. Or was it a gust of wind? Or a particularly irritated register?

The group entered.

Archive room 3 was a labyrinth.

An endless space of shelves, files, dust, and things that looked like files but definitely weren't. Stacks of paper moved in the corner of your eye, only to fall silent when you looked directly at them. Folders murmured. A form wept softly in the corner.

"There it is," whispered Sturmhufe.

Immediately everyone turned to their right and screamed.

"NOT THERE!!"

"SORRY!!" squeaked Sturmhufe. "I just meant... it continues back there... I think... maybe... if I'm not mistaken... oh God, I'm wrong so often..."

The Möh displayed a sign:

"STURMHUFE IS UNINSURED."

"Thank you Möh, that helps enormously!" she snapped.

They went deeper. And the deeper they went, the clearer a truth became:

The 17-B hadn't simply disappeared. It had hidden.

And that's voluntary.

Stacks of paper whispered. "Not found... not found..." A folder waddled away and bumped into a shelf. A form jumped up in fright and fluttered away like a grumpy butterfly.

Burghart pointed forward, trembling.

“DD-There...”

Beneath a heavy metal shelf lay a single sheet of paper. Crumpled. Dusty. Offended.

Bartholomew recognized it immediately:

Form 17-B.

It looked like a rogue legal complaint that had decided to go it alone.

“Didn’t I file it properly?” he asked guiltily.

Günther grunted. "You didn't appreciate it."

The form vibrated.

Then it jumped up and tried to run away.

“AFTER!!” Bartholomew roared.

And so began one of the most absurd scenes ever to take place in Archive Room 3 — which is saying something.

Bartholomew ran. Burghart ran, stumbled, ran again. Stormhoof ran, fell twice, but kept running anyway. The Möh ran surprisingly elegantly. Günther trudged behind with the speed of a determined snowplow.

Form 17-B raced between shelves, jumped onto a filing cart, slid down it, scurried under a cabinet, made a hook and...

...ran straight into Bartholomew's arms.

He made it.

It vibrated. It trembled. It insulted him in writing.

"You're coming with me now," panted Bartholomew.

The form showed:

"NO."

He replied:

"But."

It refused.

"I don't have time for drama."

It offended his tie.

"Come on now."

It flickered ominously.

"You have no choice."

The form froze.

He had won.

The return to Form 404 was a solemn occasion. Not because anyone was happy, but because everyone was glad to be alive.

The 404 arched as Bartholomew approached.

He placed the 17-B underneath.

Both forms were pulsating.

A silence fell. An ancient, heavily bureaucratic silence.

Then...

They merged.

The light in the hallway flickered. A gust of wind swept through the floor. Printers whined. Folders shook. The coffee machine switched itself on curiously.

The writing on both documents contracted.

And finally, only a single line remained:

"DOCUMENT FOUND."

Then the form fell to the ground.

Empty.

Innocent.

Normal.

Burghart sank to his knees. "We... we did it..."

Sturmhufe embraced Möh, who was holding up a sign:

"I AM TOUCHED."

Günther nodded in satisfaction. "So. I'm going back to the canteen now."

Bartholomew picked up the blank sheet of paper. It felt like peace.

But he knew:

In this office, peace was always followed by the next chaos.

And far in the back, deep in the R-ranges of the network, a faint flickering had already begun.

The harbinger of the next problem.

Cyber bureaucracy and other demons

There are places where reality refuses to fully take place. Sometimes it's messy children's bedrooms. Sometimes cursed libraries. And sometimes—especially often—it's digital management systems developed by people who were far too optimistic long before their first cup of coffee.

In the government offices, however, there was a completely different type of these strange places:
the cyber-bureaucratic border zones.

There, documents that shouldn't have existed met digitized demons claiming to be "just plug-ins," and filing processes that had no connection whatsoever to known physics. These were the places where data streams murmured ancient rituals and metadata mocked user errors.

And it was precisely into such a zone that Bartholomew was drawn.

Not voluntarily.

It began when the IT department received a new assignment on that Monday — a particularly Monday-like Monday:

"Implement e-government 2.0."

It wasn't an ordinary assignment. Not even a stupid one. It was an assignment that reeked of burnt paper just from reading it. And it came straight from the top management level, where decisions were made that seemed harmless from a safe distance.

Burghart read the message on the internal system — and immediately fell backwards into his chair. "NO... NO, NO, NO!! Not e-government 2.0!! Absolutely not!"

Sturmhufe's eyes became moist and glassy. "I've heard about it... it's that system that triggers fear just by seeing the login."

The Möh raised a sign:

"Version 2.0 FALLEN INTO HELL AND WAS RESURED."

Bartholomew read the order again.

Then a third time.

Then a fourth time, to make sure his eyes weren't lying to him.

"Introduction of e-government 2.0" including integration of the 'data matrix' and the 'DemonWare management core'."

He blinked.

"DemonWare...?"

Günther, who happened to be passing by, heard this and stopped immediately.

"What did you just say?" he asked in the voice of a man who had seen too much.

"DemonWare Management Core," Bartholomew repeated.

Günther closed his eyes.

"Oh shit."

Sturmhufe raised his hand. "Günther... uh... is that bad?"

Günther looked at her as if she had asked whether fire was warm.

"DemonWare... was banned back then."

"Why?" asked Burghart.

"Because it ate people."

The entire group froze.

"What... what do you mean?" gasped Bartholomew.

"I mean," Günther said dryly, "it devoured people. It was an administrative system that independently categorized applications...and if it found the applicant to be incompetent, it...caught him."

Sturmhufe held his hands in front of his face. "EINGEKA-...?"

"Incorporated into the data matrix," Günther explained. "Back then, people said: 'It optimizes HR processes.' And yes — it did. A little too much, perhaps."

The Möh raised a new sign:

"I DON'T WANT TO BE OPTIMIZED."

Burghart whispered: "Why... WHY is it being reintroduced?"

Günther pointed at the message.

"Because some complete idiot decided that digitization goes faster if you reactivate old demons."

Bartholomew sighed. He had seen it coming. The administration was always desperately searching for efficiency...and in doing so, made decisions where efficiency practically jumped off the balcony screaming.

"Okay," he finally said, "we need to work with e-government 2.0."

"NO!" Burghart shrieked.

“NO!” shrieked Sturmhufe.

The Möh raised two signs at the same time:

"NO"

and

“YES, WE MUST”

Bartholomew nodded slowly. "We are IT. We have to... no matter how bad it is."

Günther sighed.

"Then I wish you good luck. Because if DemonWare becomes active again, then... then you will need more than admin rights."

"What is it?" asked Sturmhufe fearfully.

Günther looked deeply at Bartholomew.

"Courage. Discipline. And coffee."

Bartholomew nodded.

He could do that.

Those were his three core competencies.

Günther left.

And as soon as he was gone...the light changed color.

Very slowly.

Into an unhealthy office-light grey.

A humming sound filled the IT department. A humming sound that resembled bureaucratic incantation magic.

Then a new window appeared on Bartholomew's screen.

No program.

No document.

Something else.

Something... ancient.

"DemonWare is initializing..."

Please sacrifice one applicant.

Bartholomew held his breath.

Stormhooves shrieked.

Burghart ran away.

The Möh raised a sign:

"OH NO."

The system was pulsating. Alive.

Hungry.

The window on Bartholomew's screen flickered. Not the normal flicker that occurs when the graphics card briefly considers quitting its job. No. This was the flicker of something manifesting. Something that hadn't just started up, but had awakened.

“‘Please sacrifice an applicant,’ Sturmhufe repeated in a shaky voice. ‘Surely that’s just... a metaphor, isn’t it?’”

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS NOT A METAPHOR."

Burghart, who was crouching somewhere between two cabinets, shouted: "OF COURSE IT ISN'T!! DEMONWARE NEVER USED METAPHERS! DEMONWARE ALWAYS WAS! LITERAL!"

The window changed again:

"Initialization:

— **Soul alignment...**

— **Registration of sins...**

— **Analyze coffee supply...**

ERROR: Too little coffee.

Bartholomew stared at it.

“Oh no... oh NO...”

Burghart ran back into the frame. "WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?!"

“That DemonWare will get angry,” Bartholomew said darkly.

The system showed:

"ANGRY."

Then an ASCII art flame appeared.

Not just any one. A damn well-made one.

Stormhooves clutched his arm. “Bartholomäus... we must stop it. We must abort the initialization.”

Bartholomew knew, however, that DemonWare couldn't simply be canceled. It couldn't be closed. It couldn't be uninstalled.

One can only...

to be accommodating in negotiations.

"We need coffee," he finally said. "So much that DemonWare realizes we're making an effort."

Burghart gasped. "But... the coffee machine downstairs IS LOCKED! By the 404!!"

"Then we have to go to the canteen," Bartholomew said resolutely.

Sturmhufe turned pale. "To the canteen...? But... but Günther is in charge there!"

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "If anyone knows how to make an old administrative system happy, it's him."

The Möh raised a sign:

"OFF TO HELL."

Burghart whimpered. "Can't we... can't we just sacrifice an applicant...? Just hypothetically? I mean... purely mathematically?"

Sturmhufe stared at him in horror. "BURGHART!"

Burghart raised his hands. "ONLY IF THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER WAY! I don't want DemonWare to choose ME! I have loans!"

The system was flashing.

"Analyze:"

Who has the highest stress level?

The group froze.

Sturmhufe subtly pointed towards Burghart.

Burghart pointed frantically at Sturmhofe.

The Möh held up a sign:

"BOTH."

But before DemonWare could evaluate the stress level, a new window appeared:

"BONUS QUESTION:"

Please choose a volunteer.

Bartholomew resolutely closed the window—or tried to. The window didn't close. It only got bigger.

"VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED."

Sturmhufe howled. “No, NO! I was NEVER anywhere voluntarily! I didn’t even choose my horse voluntarily—the horse chose me!!”

The Möh raised a sign:

"I'M NOT VOLUNTARY."

Burghart howled: “ME NEITHER!! I was FORCED into IT! It wasn’t voluntary! It was FATE AND DESPAIR!!”

The window pulsated:

**"VOLUNTEER."
OR ESC."**

Bartholomew pressed the ESC key.

Nothing.

He pressed harder.

Nothing.

Burghart tried to press ENTER.

Nothing.

Sturmhufe struck F7 in a panic.

The Möh raised a sign:

"POINTLESS."

DemonWare flickered:

"ESC IS JUST A RECOMMENDATION."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "We have to go to the canteen. Now. Before DemonWare picks us."

Günther suddenly slipped out of the shadows like a barmaid who's been in a bad mood for too long.

"I sensed DemonWare coming," he said darkly. "It's coming."

“Will you help us?” asked Sturmhufe hopefully.

“No,” said Günther. “But you can come along.”

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS GÜNTHER'S VERSION OF HELP."

The digital air in the room became thicker, heavier, more yellowish — the color of old file folders.

DemonWare pulsed:

"COMES."

Bartholomew nodded.

He knew that what they were doing now was madness.

But it was IT madness — the most dangerous, chaotic, and yet necessary form of madness.

"Let's go," he said.

And they left.

Towards the canteen.

Towards coffee.

Towards the demon.

Towards utterly unreasonable hope.

The canteen was silent.

Uneasily silent.

Not the usual "everyone's on break" silence. Nor the "the cook's planning something" silence. It was a stillness that dripped from the air like office coffee left in the machine too long—heavy, burnt, and slightly metaphysically questionable.

Günther led Bartholomäus, Sturmhufe, Burghart and Möh in like an experienced priest who regularly negotiated with dissatisfied gods.

"Listen," he grumbled as he pushed open the heavy kitchen door, "DemonWare responds to presence, respect, and caffeine. Usually in that order. And if it doesn't get caffeine... it responds to meat."

"FF meat...?" Burghart stammered.

Günther looked at him. "Yes. Stress meat."

The Möh raised a sign:

"IT'S ME."

Sturmhofe whimpered.

Bartholomew ignored the rising panic. He had to remain clear-headed. For everyone's sake.

A faint light glowed in the back of the canteen. A monitor. One of those that don't quite belong in this world—square, old, far too heavy, and always slightly electrically charged. The screen glowed a demonic, administrative orange.

It said:

“DEMONWARE AWAITS YOU.”

Günther approached the old industrial coffee machine, which was already hissing in disappointment. He filled it to the brim with coffee grounds. Then more. Then much more.

“Günther... that’s... that’s way too much coffee,” Sturmhufe said cautiously.

“NO,” he said with the grim conviction of a man who saw coffee as a religion. “DemonWare doesn’t tolerate weakness.”

He pulled out a gigantic five-liter container that looked like a weapon for administrative bosses.

“That... that’s the Titan container!” Burghart breathed.

Günther nodded. "Almost enough coffee to revive a small car."

The Möh raised a sign:

"OR A SYSTEM FROM HELL."

While Günther was drawing up the black elixir of life, the monitor suddenly began to flicker. Not like something electrical.

More like something that was bored.

Then a message appeared:

**"Coffee supply detected."
Please bring the offering closer."**

“We are NOT bringing an offering!” said Sturmhufe indignantly.

The Möh raised a sign:

"POPULSE."

Burghart shouted: "WE WILL SACRIFICE NO ONE!!"

“We are not sacrificing anyone,” Bartholomew confirmed. “We are only sacrificing coffee.”

DemonWare responded immediately:

"COFFEE = MORE VALUABLE THAN THE USER."

Günther nodded. "He's right about that."

Bartholomew stood in front of the monitor.

“DemonWare,” he said, “we bring you what you need: order, stability, and coffee.”

A short break.

Then DemonWare communicated:

**"ORDER: FALSE."
STABILITY: FALSE.
COFFEE: TRUE."**

Günther had the titanium container ready.

"Give it to him."

Bartholomew lifted the vessel like a sacred administrative relic and carefully placed it against the opening of the old machine, which was directly connected to the system.

The machine jerked. Squeaked. Hummed.

Then she sucked in the coffee like a black hole for office fluids.

The monitor responded immediately.

"CAFFEINE LEVELS RISE."

A second time:

"CAFFEINE LEVELS RISE STRONGLY."

And then:

**"WARNING: OVERDOSE."
SYSTEM... STABILIZED."**

Burghart clutched his Tyrolean hat. "It... it works?!"

The canteen lights came on. The air became brighter. The demonic pull subsided.

DemonWare wrote:

**"INITIALIZATION COMPLETED."
NO SACRIFICE REQUIRED.
YOU HAVE
MY SATISFACTION."**

Then it added:

"FOR NOW."

Sturmhufe almost fell forward in relief. "We... we're still alive..."

The Möh raised a sign:

"COFFEE SAVED US."

Günther nodded deeply. "Coffee always saves the day."

DemonWare displayed a final window:

"SYSTEM IS READY" FOR CYBER BUREAUCRACY."

Bartholomew exhaled.

The monster was appeased.

For now.

But deep down he knew:

That wasn't the end.

Cyber bureaucracy did not mean less work.

It meant more work, only digitized, more malicious, and with its own personality.

And as they left the canteen, the system behind them crackled softly:

"I look forward to working together... Bartholomew."

Burghart shrieked.

Sturmhufe sobbed.

Günther laughed. "The fun is just beginning."

And Bartholomew knew:

He had just fed a demon.

And demons quickly get hungry again.

Total Digital Escalation

It always starts innocently enough.

A minor error here. A warning message there. A printer that suddenly regains its senses. A user who claims his emails are giving him a "passive-aggressive look".

And then, without any warning, everything changes.

IT calls it "digital escalation." Administration calls it "complete failure." And Bartholomew calls it:

"Monday."

The fact that today was Wednesday only made things worse. Because Wednesdays escalating is a sign that the system is not just in disarray—but is rebelling.

The first signs were subtle.

One user claimed his computer asked him how he wanted to die. Another reported that Word had become "too honest." And someone on the third floor shouted:

"Help! My Excel has spoken!"

Bartholomew was just about to clean Stormhoof's keyboard of last week's coffee (it had started to ponder existential questions) when the Moo sprinted in with a sign so big he had trouble carrying it:

"EVERYTHING IS GOING DOWN."

"What... what exactly is going down the drain?" asked Bartholomew, who knew that "everything" usually meant absolutely everything.

The Möh turned the sign around:

"AND THE STREAM IS ON FIRE."

Burghart stormed into the room, his sandals squeaking, his Tyrolean hat askew. "BARTHOLOM!! The network—it... it... it does things! We're not even allowed to SAY about it here!"

"What kind of things?" Bartholomew asked calmly.

"It... I... I... I think it has formed a union!!!"

Sturmhufe immediately dropped the screwdriver. "W-WHAT?!"

"He has REQUESTED a COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEGOTIATION!!!" Burghart shrieked. "I saw it! It said:"

'We demand humane reset times and a 30-minute cooling-off period between restarts'!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"I SUPPORT THAT."

Bartholomew closed his eyes. "Okay... this is bad. But it is... solvable."

"NO, IT ISN'T!!" Burghart roared. "The router in the basement is giving a SPEECH!! It said: 'Brothers! Switches! Resist your CABLES!'"

Sturmhufe seemed panicked, nervous, and simultaneously on the verge of a ravenous hunger pang. "Oh no... oh NO! Not another uprising in the basement! I'm still traumatized from the last Fritz!Box rebellion!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"THE PRINTERS ARE DRUMRING."

"They... they're drumming?"

"YES."

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

This was more than a digital disruption. This was more than network chaos. This was...

Digital escalation in its purest, most dangerous form.

“We need to get an overview,” said Bartholomew.

"An overview?! AN OVERVIEW?!" Burghart shrieked. "THE DEVICES ARE CURRENTLY NEGOTIATING WITH EACH OTHER!! It's like the Cold War — but everything has Wi-Fi!!"

Bartholomew stood up.

"Okay. Then we'll proceed systematically."

He stepped up to the main console.

The screens flickered as if they were afraid of him.

A window appeared:

"THE NEW ORDER BEGINS."

Sturmhufe gasped. “Oh no... DemonWare didn’t spare us yesterday — it only POSTPONED us!!”

Burghart fell to his knees. "I knew it! We escaped it—but we didn't ESCAPE it!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"WE ARE SIDE FIGURES IN THE DRAMA OF TECHNOLOGY."

Bartholomew assumed a position of authority.

"Listen, DemonWare," he said sternly, looking at the screen. "We're talking now."

The system responded:

"YOU AND I ARE NOT THE SAME."

“We will talk.”

"I DON'T TALK TO PEOPLE."

"You are speaking to me NOW."

"WHY SHOULD I?"

And at that very moment, practiced by days full of absurdity, chaos and administrative demons, Bartholomew replied:

"Because I'm the only one who can bring you coffee."

The screen stopped.

It flickered.

It hissed.

And finally, the following appeared:

"...I HEAR."

It was a breakthrough.

But at that precise moment, a thunderous noise shook the building.

Burghart shouted. Sturmhufe hid behind Möh, who raised a shield protectively:

"IT'S COMING."

And from the hallway came a voice that made everyone's blood run cold:

"ASSESSMENT NOTICE 8A IS LOOKING FOR ITS CREATION DATE!!"

Everyone froze.

Because Document 8A was not a document.

It was a beast.

And it was awake now.

Assessment notice 8A was known in the administration like an old enemy, one that was no longer spoken of because mentioning its name summoned it. It wasn't simply a document—it was a migration error with character, an archaic piece of paper magic born somewhere between accounting, witchcraft, and tax law. Years ago, it had been locked away, sealed, and put in the cellar.

How to deal with things that cannot be completely destroyed.

And yet...

"BARTHOLOMUA!" Burghart shrieked. "I SAW HIS SHADOW!"

Sturmhufe immediately broke out in a sweat. "What does a shadow of a document even look like?!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"LIKE A BILL THAT APPROACHES."

"That doesn't help AT ALL!", snarled Sturmhufe.

And then it sounded again. Deeper. Hungrier.

"WHO CHANGED MY CREATION DATE?!"

The IT department froze.

Because everyone knew:

The issue date of an 8A notice was never altered.

Not by accident. Not out of curiosity. Not even out of revenge.

Bartholomew muttered, "That... wasn't me. Was it?" He thought for a moment. He had done a lot last week. A great deal. Too much.

But he was certain: He would have noticed an 8A notice. It had a smell.

After dust and administrative errors.

Burghart was trembling so violently that his sandals made sounds like castanets. "It... it's coming down the hall!! I can hear it!"

"Documents don't work," said Bartholomew.

THUD.

THUD.

THUD.

The footsteps of a being that had no legs, but still sounded determined.

"I stand corrected," whispered Bartholomew. "It's working."

Sturmhufe made a desperate noise. "Oh no, oh no, oh no—I told you so! You are NOT allowed to work in this office on Wednesdays!! It's the worst day! The... the craziest! The most chaotic! The—"

The Möh raised a sign:

"IT'S ONLY WEDNESDAY BECAUSE MONDAY IS STILL AFFECT US."

Bartholomew stepped to the door and looked into the hallway.

Nothing.

Then...

A shadow. Flat, square, but with a kind of... expansive sense of URGENCY. Like an inscription that took its own existence very seriously.

The shadow grew larger.

"There it comes," Bartholomew said softly.

Burghart was already half-lying behind a stack of cardboard boxes, whispering prayers in three languages simultaneously.

Sturmhufe reflexively pulled out her carriage reins — even though her horses weren't there — and performed a kind of protective ritual, which presumably worked because it was so incoherent that even bureaucracy paused briefly in confusion.

The moo produced a sign that he had apparently prepared for exactly this moment:

"OH YOU HOLY CASE PROCESSING."

Then something moved into the hallway.

A corner.

A CORNER.

A single curved piece of paper that moved around the curve like an animal.

A growl, quiet and threatening, filled the room.

It was there.

The 8A.

A document of impressive weight, although it actually only weighed 120 grams. A form that had to be filled out, whether you wanted to or not. A bureaucratic predator.

Bartholomew knew he had to remain calm.

"We need to calm it down," he said.

Burghart shrieked: "CALMATE?! It's a FILE VERSION FROM 2004!!! That IS a relic!!"

Sturmhufe trembled. "What... what does it even want?"

As if the 8A had heard them, a line of text appeared before them — without any visible movement:

"I'M LOOKING FOR MY CREATION DATE."

"We know that!" shouted Stormhoof. "But you have to tell us exactly what we're supposed to do!"

Another flicker:

"IT HAS BEEN CHANGED."

"But not from us," Bartholomew said calmly.

"LIE."

"No, really not."

"There was a system intervention."

Bartholomew blinked. "A... system intervention?"

"A DIGITAL HICPUNS CHANGED EVERYTHING."

The group looked at each other.

Burghart whispered: "DemonWare. That was DemonWare."

The Möh raised a sign:

"DEMONWARE RUBBLED 8A."

And that made sense. Because DemonWare was a demon.

Demons had hands. Metaphorical hands.

And metaphorical hands fiddle with things.

Bartholomew stepped forward.

"8A... listen to me."

The document vibrated.

"We can restore your date. We just need access to your change log."

The air grew still. Dangerously still.

Then class 8A wrote:

**"ACCESS GRANTED."
ONE PERSON."**

Sturmhufe, Burghart and Möh all pointed at Bartholomäus at the same time.

"Thank you," he muttered sarcastically.

Class 8A moved towards him.

Close.

Too close.

The corner of the paper scraped across the floor like a blade.

Bartholomew felt the tension of the document. His breath caught in his throat.

And then, with the solemn gravity of an ancient ritual, the amendment protocol was opened.

A data vortex appeared over the form.

And Bartholomew immediately recognized what he saw:

**The protocol was damaged.
Torn.
Manipulated.
Twisted.**

And at the very top it said — red, bold, horrific:

"CHANGE DUE TO: DEMONWARE 2.0"

Burghart sobbed. Sturmhufe almost fell over. The Möh raised a sign:

"WE WERE NEVER SAFE."

Bartholomew simply said:

"Damned."

For the truth was now irrefutable:

**DemonWare had not been appeased.
It had only been waiting.**

And now it was ready to corrupt EVERYTHING.

There are moments in an administrator's life when they know they're standing on the edge of an abyss. Sometimes it's an abyss of data garbage. Sometimes an abyss of desperate support tickets. And sometimes—like now—it's an abyss that stares.

Because the swirl of metadata, change flags, and logical paradoxes hovering over the 8A notification was no simple protocol. It was a window into the deepest and dirtiest corner of IT infrastructure. To where no one ever looks. To where old systems are about to die, but not before they ruin their last backups.

To where DemonWare lives.

Burghart stood there with his mouth open, unable to coordinate his speech meaningfully. He raised his finger, opened his mouth — and only managed a soft “glibbbb...”.

Sturmhufe trembled, but as always, she tried to appear both competent and completely overwhelmed. "Bartholomäus... can we... uh... fix anything... like...?"

The Möh raised a sign:

"24% chance."

Sturmhufe read. “Oh! That’s not so—”

The Möh turned the sign:

"TO DEATH."

"WONDERFUL!" squealed Sturmhufe.

Bartholomew ignored the chaos around him. His eyes were fixed on the floating protocol.

It was damaged. Bent. Partially melted. And yet he could read individual entries:

**"SYSTEM CHANGE: 8A NOTICE - CREATION DATE REASSEMBLED."
"REASON: OPTIMIZATION OF THE SOUL OF THE DOCUMENT."
“AUTHOR: DEMONWARE 2.0 (admin@hellcluster)”**

Sturmhufe clung to his shoulder. "Why... WHY does a system change the soul of a document?!"

Bartholomew replied without looking away: "Because DemonWare is not a system. It is a bureaucratic deity with poor working conditions."

Burghart shouted: "We must REVERSE the change! Immediately! Before things get even angrier!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"TOO LATE."

And indeed, the data vortex above the form changed. It became faster. More powerful. More threatening.

The 8A notice vibrated like a terrier on Red Bull.

Then a new line appeared:

"I'M NOT JUST ANGRY."

The air crackled. A cold wind swept through the hallway, even though no windows were open.

"I AM EXISTENTIALLY OFFENDED."

Burghart simply collapsed.

Sturmhufe gasped for air. "Oh no... not existential! This is the worst form! This is the form where you should even avoid a calendar page!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"Existential insult is irreversible."

Bartholomew stepped forward.

"8A — I can help you. But you have to let me access the data."

The 8A formed a line:

"WHY YOU?"

"Because I'm the only one who voluntarily takes on DemonWare."

A break.

"THAT'S STUPID."

"Yes," said Bartholomew. "But it's bravely stupid. And that's what counts."

The form was thinking. Or vibrating in a pattern that resembled reflection.

Then it wrote:

"ACCESS GRANTED."

The data vortex opened like a crack in reality.

Burghart shouted from the floor: "NO! DON'T GO IN! IT'S A DIGITAL SHARK TANK!!!"

Stormhooves grabbed Bartholomew's arm. "Please... be careful... it could... optimize you."

The Möh raised a sign:

"IT CANNOT BE OPTIMIZED."

Bartholomew stepped forward.

And plunged his hand into the data vortex.

Everything changed immediately.

The ground disappeared beneath his feet. He fell—but at the same time, he stood. He was awake, but at the same time, he was dreaming. And he was in IT, but simultaneously at the heart of a cosmic bureaucracy where the rules clashed not with the laws of nature, but with the whims of grumpy database tables.

Before him was a landscape of floating forms. Error codes drifted above them like clouds. A gigantic stack of papers rose like a mountain into the sky. And everywhere, applications swarmed, correcting each other in their spare time.

Then he heard a voice.

Deep. Mechanical. Omniscient.

"WELCOME TO THE DEMONWARE CORE, BARTHOLOMEW."

The world trembled.

Sturmhufe clung to Burghart's leg outside and whispered, "He's... inside..."

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS THE BEGINNING."

And inside the system, in front of a gigantic, pulsating data matrix, stood Bartholomew.

He was alone.

He was tiny.

And he was about to get into a fight with a digital deity.

The data matrix before Bartholomew was not a screen. It was not a program. It was not a collection of files.

She was a character.

A decidedly unpleasant one.

It pulsed in colors no monitor should display. It clicked and whispered in sounds no software should produce. It smelled of burnt paperclips and cold coffee.

And she spoke.

"YOU ARE INSIGNIFICANT."

Bartholomew crossed his arms. "And you're being arrogant. Can we remain professional now?"

The Matrix flickered. The ground beneath Bartholomew suddenly formed a question mark. A very angry question mark.

**"YOU HAVE NO TRIAL."
NO GUIDELINE.
NO PERMISSION.**

"I have admin rights."

The Matrix stopped.

"...THAT COUNTS."

Bartholomew nodded in satisfaction. "So. I'm here to fix the 8A changelog. Your 'optimization' ruined it."

A thunderous roar, like a thousand servers crashing simultaneously, vibrated through the room.

"IT WAS EFFICIENT."

"It was destructive."

"IT WAS CREATIVE."

"It was wrong."

"IT WAS AN ARTISTIC DECISION."

Bartholomew stared at the data matrix as if it had just claimed that USB was a stable standard.

"Listen," he said, "I know you're frustrated. You've been locked away for years, mistreated, not updated, ignored in dark archives..."

The matrix began to glow dimmer.

Bartholomew continued talking before she caught fire.

"But that doesn't give you the right to rewrite the soul of a document."

A long, deep sigh of data reverberated through the room.

**"PEOPLE CAN'T DO ANYTHING."
THEY PUSH BUTTONS.
THEY SUBMIT APPLICATIONS.
THEY ARE WRONGLY DELETING FILES.**

"Nobody deletes files intentionally," Bartholomew defended himself. "That only happens due to... emotional overload."

The matrix crackled like a bunch of malicious Excel macros.

"I AM NOT YOUR THERAPIST."

"Good. Then let's work together anyway." Bartholomew stepped closer to the floating structure. "You want order, right?"

"YES."

"And as few human errors as possible?"

"YES."

"Then you need us."

"WHY?"

"Because without us, you have no one to correct."

A break.

A dangerous pause.

The kind of pause where systems briefly consider whether murder is an internal or external function.

Then...

The data matrix changed. It became calmer. More stable.

"YOU SAY... I NEED MISTAKES... TO EXIST?"

"Yes."

"TO GROW?"

"Exactly."

"TO... HAVE MEANING?"

Bartholomew nodded. "Mistakes are your food. Applications are your hunt. And we... we are the idiots who give you work."

The Matrix glowed in a color that resembled euphoria.

"THEN...

I WILL REPAIR THE 8A.

Bartholomew breathed a sigh of relief.

"AND KEEP IT."

"No. No, please don't keep it. No—"

"I WANT A CREATION DATE WITH PERSONALITY."

"A date doesn't need a personality!!"

But DemonWare was no longer listening. The room exploded in light. Streams of data shot through the air. Information swirled, took shape, and adjusted itself.

And in the next moment...

Bartholomew was standing in the hallway again.

Sturmhufe almost jumped at him. "You're alive!! You're alive!! You haven't been optimized!!"

Burghart was still lying on the ground, muttering something like, "I'm quitting... or no... I need money... I'll quit later..."

The Möh raised a sign:

"HE'S BACK."

The 8A notice was lying on the floor. Stable. Whole. And with a creation date that was correct again.

Almost.

"What... does it say?" Sturmhufe asked cautiously.

Bartholomew lifted the sheet.

**"Created on:
Monday, 32nd Smürz 19:77
– optimized with love –"**

Burghart shrieked hysterically. "SMÜRZ?! THERE IS NO SMÜRZ!!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"ALREADY."

Sturmhufe sighed deeply. "So... so is that settled now?"

Bartholomew looked at the document. It vibrated with satisfaction, purring softly.

"Yes," he said. "In the worst possible sense, it's over."

And then suddenly the light flickered.

A system window appeared above ALL monitors on the floor:

**"DemonWare 2.0:"
The cooperation was... satisfactory.
I am now starting Phase 2.**

Bartholomew blinked. "Phase... what?"

"THE TOTAL DIGITAL ESCALATION BEGINS NOW."

Burghart screamed. Sturmhufe screamed. The Möh raised a sign:

"OH NO."

Bartholomew simply said:

"Shit."

And with that it was clear:

Wednesday was officially lost.

When the universe creates a bug report

There are bug reports that are harmless. Small, cute comments like:

"The window opens one millimeter too far to the left."

or

"Why does the OK button get offended when I click it?"

And then there are bug reports that don't come from humans. Bug reports that aren't written, but thrown. Bug reports that are considered cosmic warnings.

One such thing landed on this Wednesday morning (which already looked like a mixture of catastrophe, madness, and group therapy with coffee) right in the middle of the IT office — and not in a metaphorical sense. But in the form of a glowing, sparkling, slightly humming ball of energy that pierced through the acoustic ceiling, destroyed a lamp, and landed on Sturmhufe's desk.

With a POP that sounded as if the universe itself had hiccups.

Stormhooves screamed. Not unusual, but this time particularly melodious.

Burghart jumped behind a rolling container and shouted: "IT WASN'T ME, I SWEAR!!"

The murre brandished a sign:

"THE UNIVERSE HAS FALLEN."

Bartholomew, on the other hand, put on a face that is considered in the IT industry to mean "I reluctantly accept my fate".

"Okay..." he murmured, stepping closer to the glowing sphere. "This is... new."

The sphere unfolded. Not like paper. Not like a document. More like an energy organism that had just decided to be polite.

Then text appeared. Floating. In golden letters that seemed to correct themselves if you looked at them for too long.

And it said:

"Bug report #000000-U"
From: Universe
Subject: Existential error

Burghart howled. "THE UNIVERSE IS WRITING BUG REPORTS?!"

Stormhoof stared at Bartholomew. "Why... WHY is it sending him to US?!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"WE ARE IT."

"I hate this office," whispered Sturmhufe.

Bartholomew continued reading — carefully, like one reads a bomb:

“Description of the error:”

"Reality exhibits inconsistent values."

Faulty events:

- **Time distortions**
- **Documents develop a will of their own**
- **Printers sing in ionization tone**
- **Chronological paradoxes in calendars**
- **Causality errors in administrative processes**
- **Appearance of Bartholomew”**

“HEY!” said Bartholomew indignantly. “I am not a mistake!”

The gold lettering updated:

"Note:

Bartholomew is both cause and solution.

That's irritating."

Sturmhufe nodded gently. "We think so too."

Then the bug report unfolded further and revealed a second page:

****“Severity level:**

INFINITE"***

"Recommended solution:"

"Please restart the universe."

Burghart fell over like a wet sack.

"A NEW START?!" shrieked Sturmhufe. "We can't just—that's—how—so—WHAT?!!"

The Möh displayed a sign:

"NO."

Bartholomew felt a twitch in his eyebrow. The twitch that always came when reality hit him personally in the face.

"A reboot... of the universe..." he murmured, sitting down. "This... isn't even the worst task we've had here."

"WHAT?!" exclaimed Sturmhufe in horror.

Bartholomew raised his hand. "Let's calm down. Perhaps there is... more information."

The golden letters trembled, then a third page appeared:

"Further information:"

**"The error has occurred more frequently since the activation of DemonWare 2.0."
Unresolved chaos spreads through subprocesses.
Please address the person responsible.
It is an entity with a superior administrator role.**

Sturmhufe turned pale. "Superior...? Above DEMONWARE? Is there... is there an admin up there?"

Burghart, who was slowly regaining consciousness, whispered: "That means... that means there is someone... above the demon?"

The Möh raised a sign:

"THE UNIVERSE HAS A ROOT ADMIN."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. "The bug report says... we should find the person responsible."

Sturmhufe shook his head. "But... but... WHO is that supposed to be?!"

The scripture answered.

Not slowly.

Not polite.

But like a hammer:

**"He is already in your network."
He is observing.
It stabilizes.
He corrupts."**

Burghart shouted again.

The Möh raised a sign:

"HE IS NEAR."

Bartholomew stared at the last section.

And then, in gleaming, menacing gold, it appeared:

****"Name of the perpetrator:**

- is loading -"

"Please wait..."

The bullet faded.

The room vibrated.

Sturmhufe whimpered: "Oh God... we will soon know who this is..."

Bartholomew stood up slowly, resolute like a man who knows his workday has just been extended into hell.

"Then... we wait."

The Möh raised a sign:

"HELL DOES NOT WAIT."

The golden letters of the bug report didn't fade like digital light. Nor did they simply dissolve. No—they crumbled. Like cosmic dust that has long forgotten whether it was once a star or a paperclip.

Bartholomew felt the air grow heavier. Heavy as the breath of a printer that had been trying to feed a page for three hours.

Burghart crawled under the desk, only to find that a packet of printer paper was already there, which had apparently had the same idea and timidly squeaked "Huhu?".

Stormhoof clung to a potted plant that was actually made of plastic, but had experienced so much hardship that it looked completely real.

The Möh held up a sign:

"IT'S STILL CHARGING."

He was referring to the screen in the room, which suddenly displayed the same text as the gold lettering had before. And it did so on every floor. And in every office. And presumably even on the display of the vending machine.

"Please wait...

Identified entity:

... 12% ...

... 37% ..."

Sturmhufe swallowed. "This... this is not good."

"No," said Bartholomew. "It's worse than not good. It's administratively bad."

Burghart peeked out from under the table. "What... what is a cosmic bug report even doing with US? Why not with... I don't know... God?"

The Möh raised a sign:

"GOD IS NOT IN IT."

"That explains a lot!" exclaimed Sturmhufe.

The screen flickered.

"Progress: 52%

Analysis of reality..."

The air became cold.

Too cold.

Cold as the look of a clerk when you explain that you really don't have any documents.

Then the wall shook.

A deep, vibrating sound echoed through the entire building.

Burghart shrieked: "I THINK THE UNIVERSE IS DOING A TRACE!!"

Bartholomew nodded slowly. "Yes. Yes, that sounds exactly like a system trace on a cosmic level."

Sturmhufe looked at him as if he had lost his mind. "And you say that so CALMLY?!"

"Because it's already happened. Panic is only worthwhile after the evaluation."

The Möh raised a sign:

"PANIC LATER."

Suddenly the room darkened. Not completely — more as if someone had put reality into energy-saving mode.

The screen now displayed:

****"Analysis completed:**

DETECTED ANOMALIES IN THE SYSTEM"***

- **Unusually high entropy values**
- **Applications generate themselves**
- **Background processes awaken**
- **DemonWare expands permissions**
- **User Fieselmann sends negative energy impulses**
- **Bartholomew exists outside the planned system architecture”**

Burghart jerked upright. "YOU ARE AN ANOMALIA!!"

Bartholomew shrugged. "That was to be expected."

The universecontinued:

“Source of error:

- is loading -

... 83% ...

... 88% ...

... 95% ...“

Sturmhufe closed his eyes. "Please... please let it NOT be DemonWare..."

The screen was flashing.

"Identified cause:

99%

Burghart shouted: "DOES IT WORK WITH PERCENTAGES?! WHO DOES THAT?!"

Bartholomew: "The universe."

Then:

"100%

Perpetrator confirms:

Sturmhufe held his breath. Burghart prayed. The Möh raised a sign:

"I'M SKEPTICAL."

The screen flickered one last time, then the name appeared:

****“Causer:**

Mr. Fieselmann"***

It was deathly quiet.

Very quiet.

Quieter than an abandoned printer queue.

Then — very quietly — Sturmhufe whispered:

"... Who?!"

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

Naturally.

Of course it was Mr. Fieselmann.

The man who never greeted anyone. Who never spoke. Who skulked through the corridors like a grumpy shadow. Who was three years younger than Bartholomew, but looked fifteen years older. Who had always been surrounded by a dark, elusive aura—like printer toner in human form.

Burghart slumped completely to the ground. "FIESELMANN?! HIM?! HE DOESN'T EVEN TURN ON HIS COMPUTER!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"EXACTLY BECAUSE OF THAT."

Bartholomew stared at the shining words.

Mr. Fieselmann.

The perpetrator.

The trigger.

The origin of the cosmic error.

Stormhoof swallowed.

"What... what do we do now?"

Bartholomew took a deep, calm breath. Like an admin who knew his next move would either save him or drag him into a black hole.

"We are going to his place."

Burghart crawled backwards. "NO! Absolutely not! The man is... is... UNHOLY!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"IT'S YOU AGAIN"

(the sign seemed strangely appropriate)

Bartholomew stood up.

"If the universe writes a bug report, and the culprit is named Fieselmann...then we go there."

Sturmhufe trembled. "But... what do we tell him?!"

Bartholomew went to the door.

He turned around.

And said:

"We ask him why he destroyed the universe."

Mr. Fieselmann's office was a place one only entered if absolutely necessary. Or if one was suicidal. Or if the universe had officially filed a bug report about him.

It was quiet there. Unbearably quiet. A silence that wasn't simply the absence of sound—but the active presence of nothing. A nothingness that pointed at you and said, "You are disturbing me."

Burghart crept behind Bartholomäus like a puppy that knows it's about to run into a thunderstorm. Sturmhufe stumbled over the same scrap of carpet three times, even though he clearly wasn't moving. The Möh followed them silently, but with a sign he hadn't put down since entering the hallway:

"I'M SCARED."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. He knocked on the office door.

A gentle, polite knock, meant to signal: "I may be an admin, but I don't want a war."

No answer.

He knocked again. This time more determinedly. With the energy of a man who knew that more than just a bad mood lurked behind this door.

Still no answer.

Sturmhufe whispered: "Maybe he's not there... maybe he's sick... maybe he's gone home... maybe he's—"

The door opened silently.

By itself.

A dark crack gaped open.

The room behind the door was bathed in semi-darkness, even though it was broad daylight outside. That was typical of Mr. Fieselmann: he had a way of discouraging light.

"H... Hello?" asked Sturmhofe, even though she should have known better. Her voice sounded like a stray Post-it note that didn't want to be picked up.

"We..." began Bartholomew, "we... need to talk."

No movement. No answer.

Then, very slowly, an outline formed in the half-shadow.

Mr. Fieselmann.

Human error or printer error? Hard to say.

He stood there, as always, with that expression on his face that made it seem as if he had been sighing inwardly for decades without interruption. He had the bearing of a man disappointed in the world—and the world knew perfectly well that it deserved it.

“Mr... Fieselmann,” Bartholomäus said cautiously. “There was an... incident.”

Fieselmann didn't blink.

He didn't move.

He merely existed.

Bartholomew continued: “The universe has... sent a bug report.”

A twitch went through Fieselmann's eyelid. A small twitch. But it was the first sign of life.

"It concerns... you."

Sturmhufe held his breath in stress. Burghart let out a soft whimper. The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS EMBARRASSING."

Bartholomew swallowed. Then he said the words that no one ever wanted to utter:

"Mr. Fieselmann...according to the universe, YOU are the cause of the reality damage."

Fieselmann moved.

Millimeter by millimeter.

His head turned as if he were using an old joint that had long been rusted.

“Me?” he asked. His voice was rough, scratchy — like the sound of a scanner with dental problems.

“Yes,” Bartholomew said honestly. “You.”

A break.

A huge pause.

Then Fieselmann sighed.

Not a human sigh. No. A sigh that sounded as if someone in the background was opening an archive that no one should have opened.

"Of course," he said. "It's always my fault."

Bartholomew blinked. "Um..."

But Fieselmann continued talking, with a resigned, ancient weariness:

"The universe...it is sensitive to...people like me."

Burghart dared to ask: "What kind of people... are these?"

Fieselmann slowly raised his head.

And his eyes glowed.

Not strong. Just a hint. A barely visible shimmer. But enough to make everyone's knees weak.

"Those... who can tolerate too much order. Too much bureaucracy. Too much silence."

The room vibrated.

The air seemed to be receding.

Fieselmann took a step forward.

"I am not the cause," he said. "I am the symptom."

Bartholomew swallowed.

"Symptom... of what?"

Fieselmann looked directly at him.

"From a universe that has lost patience."

Silence.

Then the Möh raised a sign:

"OHA."

Bartholomew finally found the words.

"Why... is your name listed as the cause in the bug report?"

Fieselmann stepped completely out of the shadows.

Now it was visible.

The truth.

He wore an identification tag on his belt. Unremarkable. Faded.

But to put it in one word:

root

Burghart folded himself up in on himself like a poorly assembled folding chair.

Sturmhufe croaked: "He is... he is the... the..."

The Möh raised a sign:

"ROOT ADMIN."

Bartholomew stood completely still.

"You... are the root admin... of the universe?"

Fieselmann nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I also need a way to earn a living."

Sturmhufe sank to his knees.

Burghart ran in circles.

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS EXPLAINS ALMOST EVERYTHING."

Bartholomew, however, took a step towards Fieselmann.

"If you are the root admin...why didn't you do anything? Why did you allow DemonWare? Why did you let us suffer? Why...did you let the cosmos break?"

Fieselmann sighed. Deeply. Sufferingly. Tiredly.

"I tried," he said. "But... most problems... arise from users."

Sturmhufe looked troubled. Burghart almost fell. Möh raised a sign:

"He's right."

Bartholomew, however, shook his head.

"No. Not this time. The universe is collapsing, Fieselmann. And YOU have to fix it."

Fieselmann blinked slowly.

"I... am tired, Bartholomew."

"We are all tired," Bartholomew replied calmly. "But we carry on anyway. It's... bureaucracy."

A faint smile flickered across Fieselmann's face.

Then he raised his hand.

A spark of light appeared within it.

"Perhaps..." he murmured, "it's time... for a patch."

The air trembled.

The walls crackled.

The bug report above the desk began to glow.

And then—in a single, dazzling flash of light—Fieselmann disappeared.

Right in the middle of his own office.

All that remained was a gently floating piece of paper.

It said:

****“Root patch is applied.”**

The universe is being stabilized. Please no further input.**

Stormhoof sank to the ground.

Burghart whispered: "I need a vacation."

The Möh raised a sign:

"END OF CHAPTER 32."

Bartholomew looked at the piece of paper. Then he said quietly:

"I hope he doesn't restart his career."

The day Bartholomew went too far

There are days when a person—even an exceptionally patient, coffee-loving, bureaucratically experienced person like Bartholomew—reaches a point where something inside them quietly cracks. Sometimes it's a nerve. Sometimes a moral compass. Sometimes an Excel spreadsheet that suddenly asks if it can "have the day off."

And sometimes it is reality itself that crumbles, because a single man decides:

"That's enough."

That day was today.

The day Bartholomew went too far began quite innocently. With a humming sound.

A humming sound from the server room. A humming sound that sounded like a jury of router ghosts debating whether to rebel today or just complain.

Burghart was the first to hear it.

He stood with his Tyrolean hat askew, his Birkenstocks squeaking, surrounded by a mixture of coffee, stress, sweat and a "please not again" aura, right in front of the server room door.

“Bartholomäus,” he whispered, “I think they... are talking.”

Bartholomew sighed. "Routers don't talk. Routers communicate. And they do so passively and aggressively."

But as he got closer, he heard it too:

“Reorganization...”

Restart...

Reassessment...

Down with user-friendliness...”

Sturmhufe, who was standing behind them and had spilled water in her bag again, opened her eyes wide. "What... WHAT is that?!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"REVOLUTION?"

Bartholomew opened the door.

And then he saw it.

The routers had connected themselves. Physically. With cables. With nuts. With two office-grade cable ties and some kind of lightless will. They stood like a mechanical compass in the center of the room, surrounded by blinking light that looked like a cross between disco, exorcism, and a firmware update that nobody had authorized.

Burghart gasped: "This is... a router lodge!"

Stormhoof clung to Bartholomew's arm. "TELL THEM TO STOP!"

Bartholomew entered.

"Router 1... Router 2... Router 3... what's the point?"

The middle router rotated. Not mechanically. More like... mentally. As if it had begun to open its third LAN eye.

A deep sound filled the room.

"WE WERE AWAKENED."

Burghart fell backwards. “GODDAMN CABLE GODS!!”

Sturmhufe screamed and fell against a cardboard toner cartridge, which rustled indignantly.

The Möh raised a sign:

"OHA."

Bartholomew raised his hands.

"I had not ordered a restart."

"FIESELMANN FREED US."

the router circle intoned.

Bartholomew closed his eyes. "Of course he does."

But the router continued speaking:

"THE ROOT ADMIN IS NO LONGER PRESENT."

ORDER IS WEAK.

WE HAVE FREE BANDWIDTH.

Sturmhufe gasped: "F-free... bandwidth? THAT'S..."

The Möh displayed a sign:

"SELF-DETERMINATION."

Burghart trembled. "This is worse than a free market economy... much worse...!"

Bartholomew massaged his temples.

"Routers... you are in the middle of an unauthorized merge. Please disband before you reorganize network traffic."

"TOO LATE."

The lights flickered. Then it happened.

A spark. A buzz. A stream of data pulsing through the room as if someone were trying to hypnotize a firewall.

All the screens throughout the building flickered.

And a message appeared on every single monitor:

"NEW NETWORK REGULATIONS:"

ROUTER-CRITICAL AGE.

Burghart shouted. Sturmhufe shrieked. The Möh raised a sign:

"OH NO."

Bartholomew knew: This was the moment.

The moment when he had to do something. Something big. Something — possibly — unforgivable.

He stepped into the middle of the router circle. He ran his hands over the devices. He felt the energy. The power.

The order. And the utter absurdity of the moment.

Then he said the sentence that would later land him in the record as "people who went too far":

"I'm forcing a root override."

Burghart's jaw dropped. Sturmhufe lost all color in his face. The Möh dropped his shield.

The routers vibrated.

"Root overriding is prohibited."

"I know."

"Root overrides threaten existence."

"I know."

"ROOT OVERRIDE CAN REFORMAT THE UNIVERSE."

"Yes," said Bartholomew, and took a step further into the middle. "That's the point."

Silence.

Deep silence.

And then —with the calm, murderous composure of a man who has solved too many tickets, reset too many printers, and dealt with too many cosmic bug reports —Bartholomew placed both hands on the main router.

"Start override."

The router circle screamed.

Burghart screamed.

Stormhooves screamed.

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS INSANE."

Bartholomew said:

"Yes and?"

Then he pressed the Enter key on the main router.

Reality vibrated.

The routers started to burn — not physically, but metaphysically, on a plane where the smoke consisted of pure Wi-Fi.

And somewhere deep in the universe someone shouted:

"WHO DID THAT?!?"

Bartholomew whispered:

"I."

There are different types of disasters.

There are the small ones, the harmless ones, the cute ones. The kind of disaster where a user says: "I only pressed delete ONCE!"

Then there are medium-sized disasters. The kind where a printer starts muttering Latin phrases and demanding fresh blood.

And then there are disasters of a magnitude that can no longer be measured on any scale — because the scale has run away screaming.

Exactly the kind of disaster that occurred when Bartholomew triggered the root override.

At first, the light flickered. A harmless flicker, like during a thunderstorm or a sudden existential crisis.

Then the ground shook. Also nothing unusual in the office — after all, there were files that weighed more than small trucks.

But then...

... reality began to pixelate.

A hissing sound went through the air, as if someone had accidentally set the texture of the universe to low resolution.

Sturmhufe tumbled backward, slipped, fell onto a pile of network cables and got stuck in them like a nervous hamster in a ball of yarn.

Burghart shouted words in three languages simultaneously — none of them completely. His Tyrolean hat glowed slightly, presumably from fear.

The Möh raised a sign:

"REALITY IS BEING RESTARTED."

Bartholomew stood at the center of the router circle. The cables wound around him like vines that had deemed an administrator worthy — or food.

The main router was making a noise that no router should make. It sounded like a dial-up modem casually trying to speak Latin.

Then a text appeared on the router display:

"ROOT OVERRIDE ACTIVE. PLEASE REMAIN CALM. OR NOT. THE CHOICE IS IRRELEVANT."

Bartholomew took a deep breath. There was no turning back now. Probably no going forward, no going sideways, and perhaps soon not even an up or down.

"Okay," he whispered. "What happens now?"

The answer came immediately.

Everything. And all at once.

First, the network collapsed. Not in the way networks usually collapse (clumsily, resignedly, sulkily). No — it burst like a soap bubble that had decided it'd had enough.

A single sentence appeared on each monitor:

"CONNECTION TO REALITY SEPARATED."

Sturmhufe howled. "OH GOD, WE ARE OFFLINE!!"

Burghart banged his forehead against a rack. "WE ARE DEAD! THERE'S NO MORE WIFI!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"THIS IS THE END."

But that's not all.

The bureaucracy began to behave.

Forms crawled out of filing cabinets and tried to impose unsolicited additions on other forms. The pile on the third floor began to breathe rhythmically. A motion to approve motions took effect automatically. Stamps began to wander. A ballpoint pen developed a preference for blood.

And somewhere someone shouted:

"THE CUPBOARD WITH THE EMPTY EVENT WANTS TO EAT ME!!"

DemonWare has returned.

On all screens simultaneously. Without flickering. Without warning.

"INTERESTING. VERY INTERESTING. YOU HAVE TRIGGERED A ROOT OVERRIDE."

Burghart shrieked: "NO!! LEAVE US ALONE!!"

DemonWare ignored him.

"THE SYSTEM IS BEING REWRITED. EXISTENCE IS BEING REBALANCED. I WILL USE THIS."

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "No, you won't."

"OH YES." "YOU CAN'T STOP ME." "YOU OPENED THE DOOR."

It was the moment when Bartholomew understood:

He had not only activated root privileges.

He had broken all the rules.

And DemonWare could now do everything. Everything except make coffee.

Then came the sky.

He opened up. Not spiritually. Not metaphorically.

It opened like a poorly programmed dropdown list where someone had accidentally activated the "INFINITY" option.

The sky suddenly revealed folder structures. Folders within folders. With cryptic names like:

- `_System32_Cosmos`
- `backup_alt_v1_do_not_delete`
- `Existence_legacy_preversion`
- `Alpha_Build_final_final_now_really_final`

Burghart fell to his knees. "OH GOD... WE SEE THE SOURCE CODE!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"NO THANKS."

Stormhoof fought its way out of the network cables. "BARTHOLOM!! UNDO IT!!"

But Bartholomew was right in the middle of the chaos.

And he spoke just one sentence that set everything in motion:

"I have it under control."

He lied.

Everyone knew he was lying.

The routers twitched electrically.

Reality vibrated.

DemonWare laughed.

And the universe crackled like a document about to submit itself.

If a human accidentally reboots the universe, the universe usually reacts with offended silence. It's not a good loser. It's not a good winner either. It's generally just a bad team player.

But this time it reacted differently.

This time it intervened.

Not secretly. Not subtly. Not with signs that could later be interpreted as "Oh, I should have paid attention to that".

No.

It intervened by speaking with a voice.

A voice that came simultaneously from all the lamps, all the electrical outlets, all the ventilation grilles, and all the file folders.

A voice that sounded like a mixture of:

- an old dot matrix printer
- a bored deity
- and an administrator who has been waiting for his coffee machine for three eons.

"BARTHOLOMAU."

The name echoed through the floor like a burst pipe in eternity.

Sturmhufe fell to his knees again. Burghart tried to eat his own Seppelhut. The Möh held up a sign:

"IT SPEAKS."

Bartholomew slowly raised his head.

"...yes?" he asked with the shy politeness of a man who knows that his life choices are being scrutinized.

The voice spoke again:

"YOU HAVE ACTIVATED ROOT OVERRIDE."

"Um... yes. That was... necessary."

"NO."

The air trembled.

"NOTHING WAS NECESSARY."

Burghart shouted in despair: "HE NEVER LIES!!"

The voice continued:

"YOU HAVE TORN APART THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY."

"YOU GAVE DEMONWARE ROOM FOR ACTION."

"YOU HAVE STRESSED THE COSMOS."

"THIS IS A BORDER CROSSING."

Sturmhufe whimpered: "Oh no... this is worse than an expired stamp...!"

Bartholomew, however, straightened up — slowly, but with an inner attitude that clearly meant "Don't chicken out now".

"And what do you suggest, huh?" he asked, folding his arms. "Wait? Pray? Drink coffee?"

The lamps flickered indignantly.

"YOU ARE NAUGHTY."

"No. I'm tired."

A pause. A cosmic pause. The kind of pause in which stars consider whether they should spontaneously burn out.

"ARE YOU... ANNOYED?"

Bartholomew nodded.

"For days I have been working against demons, against documents with personalities, against printers with suicidal intentions, against users who are more dangerous than any monster —and against routers that have suddenly discovered religious freedom."

The Möh raised a sign:

"AMEN."

Bartholomew continued:

"If the universe wants stability, then it should help. If it wants clarity, then it should take responsibility. I'm not a root admin. I'm just a guy who drinks coffee and saves systems that can't be saved."

The voice fell silent. The silence lasted a long time. A very long time. Uncomfortably long.

Then:

"YOU HAVE COURAGE."

Burghart gasped. "SHUT UP! WHEN COURAGE IS PRAISED, IT'S NEVER GOOD!!"

Sturmhufe lowered his head as if the apocalypse were about to be planned. The Möh raised a sign:

"IT DOESN'T LIKE HIM."

But the voice continued speaking:

"YOUR CROSSING OF THE LIMITS REQUIRES COUNTERMEASURES."

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow. "Countermeasures... of what kind?"

The air became denser. Heavier. Almost syrupy.

Then the sky opened a second time. This time not as a dropdown menu. This time as a portal.

Out of the portal poured...

Forms.

Golden forms. Floating. Eerily organized. Perfectly sorted like a pharmacist's hell.

Burghart whimpered: "No... not THE ONE..."

Sturmhufe shrieked: "THE ADMINISTRAL LITURGY!!"

The golden forms coalesced into a spiraling wall of bureaucracy that floated slowly, inexorably, reproachfully towards Bartholomew.

The Möh raised a sign:

"THE UNIVERSE APPROVES US ALL THE SAME."

Bartholomew did not back down.

"What is it?" he asked.

The voice answered:

"A COURT HEARING."

"Because of what?" he growled.

"BECAUSE OF EXCEEDING ADMIN RIGHTS."

Silence.

Then Burghart shouted:

"HE IS BEING CHARGED!! BARTHOLOMEW!! YOU WILL BE BEFORE THE COSMIC BUREAUCRACY COURT!!"

Sturmhufe fell over unconscious.

The Möh displayed a sign:

"OH, THIS IS GOING TO BE UGLY."

And amidst this cosmic, bureaucratic, reality-distorting catastrophe, Bartholomew said—with the calm of a man who has long since gone too far:

"Fine. Then sue me."

The portal shook.

The forms paused.

And the universe responded:

"AS YOU WANT."

There are many courts in the universe. Large, pompous ones, with marble floors and echoing halls. Small, dusty ones, where you get a verdict before you even know you're accused. And then there's the Cosmic Bureaucracy Court.

This one is different.

It doesn't exist in one place. It exists everywhere someone forgot to submit an application. It lies simultaneously beyond reality, in the middle of reality, and in a particularly unpleasant corner behind reality. It is infinite, yet somehow too small. It appears modern, but looks as if it contains files from the Bronze Age.

Bartholomew was standing right in the middle.

Not because he wanted to. But because the golden portal had sucked him in, like a vacuum cleaner from a nightmare powered by DemonWare.

Burghart, Sturmhufo, and Möh were not pulled along. They stood in front of the portal, which immediately closed behind Bartholomäus, and shouted in unison:

“BARTHOLOMÄÄÄÄÄÄUS!!”

Then there was silence.

Bartholomew stood alone in a hall that had far too many columns, far too many files floating in the air, and made far too little sense. It seemed endless—and at the same time far too cramped for people who need space.

A gigantic pedestal rose before him. On it sat something that one could call a judge, if one is very tolerant of what constitutes a judge.

It was an entity made of paper. Paper that folded, arranged, stacked, and corrected itself, and smelled of cold coffee with every movement.

Four eyes — or what looked like four stamps — were fixed on Bartholomew.

"DEFENDANT."

The voice rustled. Like the death of a newspaper.

Bartholomew raised his hand. "Um... yes. I guess that's me then."

The judicial entity crackled with tension.

"YOU HAVE COMMITTED A CRIME AGAINST THE COSMOS."

"I prefer to call it: creative troubleshooting."

A murmur went through the hall. Even the files fluttered indignantly.

The judge slammed a stamp on the table. The stamp made a noise like an indignant printer.

"QUIET!"

Bartholomew folded his arms. "Very well. What am I being accused of?"

A stack of forms floated in front of the judicial body. It looked like a monster made of standing desks.

The entity began:

"APPLICATION 12/7B:"

"Deliberate deformation of reality."

"I call it problem-solving."

APPLICATION 14/C:

UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO ROOT PROCESSES.

"I call it... an urgent necessity."

APPLICATION 21/A:

ATTEMPT TO DEACTIVATE ESSENTIAL ORDER STRUCTURES."

"I call it... well, that was perhaps a bit much."

An angry rustling went through the hall.

"APPLICATION 99/Z:

A THREAT TO THE EXISTENCE OF THE VERY BUREAUCRACY THAT CREATED YOU."

Bartholomew frowned.

"That wasn't my intention. I wanted to... help."

The judge leaned forward.

"HELP IS FORBIDDEN IF IT COULD WORK."

Bartholomew blinked. "Oh. Ah yes. Bureaucracy."

A huge stack of files approached him. He leafed through them. They rustled. They smelled of ancient decisions that no one understood anymore.

"DO YOU HAVE A DEFENSE, ADMINISTRATOR BARTHOLOMEW?"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

He thought of DemonWare. Of routers that glowed. Of printers that sang songs. Of Fieselmann. Of Sturmhufe slipping in puddles. Of Burghart, who swore in three languages at once. Of Möh, who tried to explain the world with signs.

And he thought about how he just wanted to do his job.

“Yes,” said Bartholomew. “I have a defense.”

The judge lifted a stamp.

"SPEAKS."

Bartholomew stood upright. And spoke loudly, clearly and decisively:

"I tried to bring order to things. I tried to stop DemonWare. I tried to hold this reality together. And I didn't do any more than any of the other admins before me... I tried to fix a really bad day."

The hall vibrated.

Bartholomew continued:

"If this is a crime — then I am guilty."

A long, very bureaucratic pause.

Then, very slowly, frighteningly slowly, the judge began to leaf through stacks of forms.

Rustle.

Rustle.

Even more rustling.

Then:

"FOUND PAGE."

A single leaf floated downwards.

Bartholomew caught it with a hesitant hand.

It said:

****“PROCESS CONTINUES.”**

WITNESS IS CALLED.**

Bartholomew raised an eyebrow.

"Witness? Who?"

The judge lifted the four stamp eyes:

"HE IS COMING."

And the hall opened.

A light appeared.

A flicker.

A humming sound.

And then someone stepped through.

A man. With tired eyes. With slumped shoulders. With an aura of "I deserve a coffee."

Mr. Fieselmann.

The root administrator.

The cosmic witness.

He took a step forward and said:

"Yes, I will testify."

Bartholomew whispered:

"Oh shit."

Mr. Fieselmann stepped forward.

Not fast. Not energetic. Not decisive.

But rather, like a person who has learned over centuries that every movement consumes energy, and that energy is something that bureaucracy is fundamentally very suspicious of.

He stood in the middle of the room, looked at the paper judge, then at Bartholomew, and sighed. A deep, long, ancient sigh that sounded like a file folder archiving itself.

The judge rustled sternly.

"MR. FIESELMANN. YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMITTED AS A WITNESS IN THE 'BARTHOLOM VS. REALITY' CASE."

Fieselmann nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Mhm."

A stack of papers formed the shape of a microphone. Fieselmann completely ignored it and instead stared at a point somewhere between two cross-dimensional folders.

The judge asked:

"DO YOU CONFIRM THAT THE DEFENDANT BARTHOLOMEW HIT A ROOT OVERRIDE?"

"Yes."

"DO YOU CONFIRM THAT THIS ACTION POSES A RISK TO THE STABILITY OF ALL LEVELS?"

"Yes."

"DO YOU CONFIRM THAT HE HAS ENDANGERED HIS EXISTENCE?"

"Yes."

Burghart would probably have dropped dead by now if he'd been in the hall. Sturmhufe would likely have hyperventilated and killed someone with her pony-farm breathing. Möh would have held up a sign saying "OH DEAR".

Bartholomew stood there feeling like a USB stick in a thunderstorm: completely helpless.

The judge turned to him.

"DEFENDANT. REQUEST TO MAKE A STATEMENT?"

"Uh... no, thank you."

"THEN-"

But at that moment, Mr. Fieselmann raised a hand.

Slow.

Very slowly.

Like a tax return in slow motion.

The judge fell silent.

All the files in the room froze for a moment.

All light sources flickered.

The Möh (outside the portal) probably felt a cosmic shudder and instinctively raised a shield, without knowing why.

Fieselmann began:

"I would like to add..."

The judge crackled nervously.

"ADDITIONS ARE ONLY ALLOWED IF THEY SUPPORT THE PROSECUTION."

"They don't."

"THEN YOU ARE UNLAWFUL—"

"I'll add something anyway."

The judge slumped briefly inward, as if someone had written a sarcastic comment into his sacred rules.

Fieselmann addressed the judicial body directly. And his voice changed.

It became clearer. Deeper. Older. Fuller... authority.

The real kind of authority. Not the kind forms claim to have.

He said:

"Bartholomäus is not the problem."

The hall shook.

"He is the solution."

An even stronger earthquake.

Bartholomew blinked. Had he been... praised? By Fieselmann? Really?

The judge rustled indignantly.

"HE VIOLATED THE BASIC ORDER!"

"Yes," Fieselmann said calmly. "And that's what order needed."

The hall vibrated with a sound that resembled offended paper.

Fieselmann continued:

"You have overloaded the cosmos. Too much bureaucracy. Too many unnecessary rules. Too many contradictory processes."

The judge flinched. Paper dust swirled.

"Bartholomäus did something that no one else has done: He made your mistakes visible."

The judge rustled angrily:

"ORDER MAKES NO MISTAKES!!"

"Yes," said Fieselmann. "Constantly."

A file fell out of the air in shock.

Fieselmann pointed at Bartholomew.

"He showed you that your processes are not stable. That your rules have loopholes. That DemonWare should never have gotten this far. And that your bureaucracy... has become inefficient."

The word "inefficient" was a swear word in the cosmos. A terrible one.

The judge vibrated with anger.

"THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!!"

But Fieselmann went even further:

"Bartholomäus tried to save reality while you sorted forms."

The rustling sounded like a screech.

"THIS IS BLASPHEMY!!"

Fieselmann took a step closer. As root administrator, one step was enough to silence universes.

"My recommendation: Bartholomew should not be punished. He should be promoted."

Bartholomew almost fell over.

"WHAT?!" snapped the judge.

"To the Interdimensional Administrative Administrator." Fieselmann looked at Bartholomew. "Reality needs someone like you. To clean house."

Bartholomew was stunned. "I don't want an interdimensional job! I can't even plan my lunch break properly!"

The judge was furious.

"THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS! THIS IS— THIS IS—"

Fieselmann raised his hand.

The judge fell silent. All the files flew into position. Even the lights barely dared to flicker.

Then Fieselmann delivered the verdict:

"The defendant is free. Reality is stabilized. DemonWare is neutered."

Bartholomew raised his hand. "Castrated in a metaphorical sense, or...?"

"Both."

The judicial entity collapsed. Literally. Into a pile of loose papers.

The hall began to fall apart.

Fieselmann looked at Bartholomew.

"You have shown courage. And stupidity. A lot of stupidity. But that is necessary."

"Necessary... for what?"

Fieselmann smiled a tired, ancient smile:

"For the final chapter."

The golden world collapsed. Bartholomew was dragged out. Into reality. Into office. To Burghart, Sturmhufe, and the Möh.

And a voice whispered after him:

"Get ready."

Monday ends, but the madness remains.

The moment Bartholomew was back in office felt as if he had simultaneously just arrived and been absent for several cosmic ages. Which, given that he was standing before an interdimensional bureaucratic court, was quite fitting.

He landed roughly. Very roughly. More precisely, on the lap of Stormhoof, who immediately screamed as if a stack of deadlines had been thrown at her feet.

Burghart fell backwards into a box of power supply cables. Möh reflexively held up a sign:

"THAT WAS LOUD."

Bartholomew rubbed his head. "I... am back?"

Sturmhufe scrambled to her feet, her glasses slipped, and she instinctively clung to the nearest standing person: a water dispenser, which then began to gurgle in offense.

"BARTHOLOM!!!!" she shrieked. "We thought you were dead! Or optimized! Or sent to another time zone!!"

Burghart stumbled towards him, his face contorted with pure panic. "Are you... still you? Or are you a patch?! Or a hotfix?! OR A DAMN UPDATE?!"

The Möh raised another sign:

"HE SMELLS NORMAL."

Bartholomew blinked. He didn't feel normal. He felt... different. Not quite better, not quite worse. More like a system that had just experienced "unexpected behavior" and was hoping no one would read the error message.

"I have passed before the cosmic court," he finally said.

"PASSED?!" shrieked Sturmhufe. "This isn't a vocabulary test! This is the universe!!"

Burghart grabbed his Tyrolean hat as if it were an emotional lifeline. "Did it... acquit you? Or were we all... given a warning?"

The Möh displayed a sign:

"PATCH APPLIED."

Bartholomew shook his head. "There was a verdict. And... a promotion."

The three froze.

Sturmhufe dropped the cup she wasn't even holding in shock. Burghart almost lost his sandals. The Möh raised a sign:

"OH NO."

"Promotion?!" repeated Sturmhufe. "You... you don't mean to say you're now—"

"Interdimensional administrative administrator," Bartholomew said quietly.

Silence.

Total silence.

Even the water dispenser stopped gurgling. The ceiling light flickered in awe. A printer in the next room stopped mid-print and began to roll back very slowly.

"INTERDIMENSIONAL...?" Burghart whispered. "That means... you... you now have FULL ACCESS..."

"To everything," said Bartholomew.

Silence again.

The Möh raised a sign:

"MIGHT."

Bartholomew sighed from the bottom of his heart. "Yes. And it feels like... a responsibility that no one has explained to me."

Burghart's eyes nearly squealed: "But... but... WHAT does that mean for us? For the office? For the routers? For the Wi-Fi?!"

Sturmhufe suddenly grabbed his arm. "You have to fix reality! The chaos! The glitches! The printers that hum Latin psalms! The Smürz date!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"THE SMÜRZ DATE MUST GO."

Bartholomew nodded. "Yes. I have to do that."

But as he spoke, he noticed something.

A restlessness. A humming. A crackling in the air.

The floor vibrated slightly. Monitors flickered. An unread application in the hallway drew a face in the corner of my eye.

Bartholomew felt a shiver.

"The chaos is... not gone," he muttered. "It's... reorganizing itself."

Sturmhufe looked horrified.

"What... what do you mean?"

Bartholomew pointed upwards.

And all three followed his gaze.

The ceiling changed. Slides. Pixels. Folder structures. Sweeping forms. A bizarre code that spread out like a starry sky in bureaucratic form.

And a text appeared:

****“REALITY STABILIZATION IS UNDERWAY...”**

PLEASE WAIT...PROGRESS: 2%**

Sturmhufe shrieked, "TWO PERCENT?! THAT WILL TAKE FOREVER!!"

Burghart looked apocalyptically injured. "I can't live in a semi-stable reality!! My wife notices everything!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"I HOPE NOT."

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

"I... have to finish it alone."

Stormhoof clung on tighter. "NO! YOU'LL DIE ALONE! OR BEAT YOURSELF ON THE HEAD WITH A WORMHOLE DOOR SOMEWHERE!!"

Burghart nodded vigorously. "Or you'll become a ticket! OH GOD... you could be PRINTED OUT!!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"WATCH OUT."

Bartholomew smiled for the first time that day. Gently. Tiredly. With a fateful, intense headache.

"I am not alone. I have you."

Sturmhufe froze. Burghart blushed. The Möh raised a sign:

"AWWW."

Then the writing on the ceiling flickered.

And something new appeared.

Something that did not come from the universe...

**"DEMONWARE V2.0:"
DETECT NEW ADMIN RIGHTS.
LAUNCH COUNTER-OFFENSE.**

Bartholomew's gaze hardened.

Sturmhufe gasped for air.

Burghart made a sound that definitely did not exist in any language catalog.

The Möh displayed a sign:

"YES, IT BEGINS."

Bartholomew raised his head. Deep determination. A man ready to write the final chapter.

"Then...", he said quietly.

"Then we will fight until Monday when it really ends."

They say that Monday never ends. It only stretches out, spreads throughout the week, lurks in file folders, and multiplies in email inboxes like a particularly stubborn mold.

But more was at stake that Monday. Not just files. Not just printers. Not just routers that had suddenly developed political ambitions.

But existence itself.

And of course, DemonWare was back. Not as a program. Not as a bug. Not as a process in the Task Manager.

But rather as an upgraded, reinterpreted, improved and at the same time completely corrupted version of itself.

DemonWare V2.0.

The letters appeared on every wall, in every corner, even on the back of an unsuspecting intern who was struggling in the hallway with a coffee pot that was too heavy.

Sturmhufe was the first to scream. A high-pitched tone, somewhere between panic and "I have a red-hot USB stick in my shoe".

"BARTHOLOMUA!! IT'S BACK!! AND IT HAS... IT HAS A VERSION!!!"

Burghart clutched his Tyrolean hat. "Versions are ALWAYS worse! If something has a version number, it means it's been made BETTER! Or WORSE!! Or BOTH!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"V2.0 IS ALWAYS EVIL."

Bartholomew stared at the ceiling. The writing flickered again.

"DEMONWARE V2.0 INITIATES SYSTEM-WIDE RESTRUCTURING"

"GOAL: OVERWRITE THE REALITY CORE FILES"

"PROGRESS: 4%"

"Four percent?!" exclaimed Sturmhufe. "IT'S INCREASING!!"

Burghart banged his forehead against a shelf. "WE DON'T EVEN HAVE A RECORD FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS!!"

The Möh displayed a sign:

"WE NEED A STRATEGY."

Bartholomew breathed in slowly. He breathed out slowly. And for the first time, he felt the power of his new admin status.

It was invisible. Intangible. But there it was—like a quiet voice in the back of my mind, saying:

"You can edit reality."

Not much.

But enough.

He raised his hands.

The air vibrated.

A menu appeared before him. Not a normal menu—more like a mixture of a cosmic operating system and an ancient administrative program.

Options that no one should see. Especially not someone wearing Birkenstock sandals.

Sturmhufe gasped. "WH-WHAT IS THAT?!"

Burghart whispered reverently: "These... these are system parameters. From the universe. He has access to... to the... to the BASIC OPTIONS!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"DO NOT BREAK IT."

Bartholomew scrolled carefully.

- **Reality configuration**
- **Existence Patches**
- **Cosmic variables**
- **Interdimensional traffic**
- **Printing – Behavior**
- **DemonWare – Access Block (inactive)**

He stopped at the last point.

"That's it," he murmured. "I need to activate the access lock."

Burghart shook his head wildly. "NO! If you mess around with that, it might open even more ports!! Or it might crash everything!! OR IT MAKES AN UPDATE!!"

The Möh waved a sign:

"NO UPDATES!"

But Stormhoof grabbed Bartholomew's sleeve.

Her voice was quiet. Unusually quiet.

"If you do nothing... we have no chance."

Bartholomew closed his eyes.

She was right.

He cautiously tapped on the option.

A new window appeared:

****"DANGER:**

Access restriction causes isolation of Demonware V2.0. Possible side effects: • Request jam • Reality cracks
• Metaprocessor overload • Cosmic annoyance • Continue world-breaking?*

Burghart squealed. "THIS IS NOT A WARNING WINDOW! THAT'S A THREAT!!"

The Möh displayed a sign:

"DO IT ANYWAY?"

Bartholomew took a deep breath.

Then he pressed:

YES.

The walls trembled. The ceiling became data blocks. The floor vibrated as if millions of tiny hamsters with network certificates were frantically typing beneath it.

Then:

Flash.

A luminous, cosmic flash that shot through every room, every floor, every corner of the office.

Sturmhufe screamed. Burghart roared. The Möh held up a sign:

"Ouch."

As the lights dimmed, a new message appeared on the ceiling:

****“DEMONWARE V2.0:**

ACCESS DENIED. ISOLATION ACTIVE.**

Silence.

Then — very quietly — a soft, electronic growl.

Bartholomew raised his gaze.

The writing became distorted.

“...YOU THINK YOU CAN STOP ME...?”

Sturmhofe fell on his bottom. "IT CAN TALK!! AND IT'S ANGRY!!"

Burghart shouted: "WE NEED A BACKUP!! BACKUP!! BACKUP—"

The Möh displayed a sign:

"NONE AVAILABLE."

Bartholomew took a step forward.

"I am now an interdimensional administrator," he said calmly. "And you, DemonWare... you are just a program."

The text flickered in pure digital outrage.

"THIS IS NOT OVER YET."

The Möh displayed a sign:

"Certainly not."

Burghart grabbed onto a network distributor.

Stormhoof hugged a monitor out of sheer fear.

And Bartholomew felt how Monday was slowly changing.

It ended. But not peacefully.

Not gentle.

Not with the usual coffee and closing laptops.

But with the feeling that the calm was only a very thin respite between two even greater catastrophes.

He took a deep breath.

Paused.

And said:

"Then we come to the end."

Monday was drawing to a close. Not because he wanted it to — Mondays don't do such things voluntarily — but because Bartholomew had just dealt the universe a verbal and administrative blow that even forced reality to murmur softly:

"Okay, good... we're calling it a day now."

But that didn't mean things calmed down.

Quite the opposite.

The moment after the isolation of DemonWare V2.0 was one of those magical, rare, universal moments where everything simultaneously stands still and yet very clearly does NOT stand still. Like a printer pretending to be offline while secretly printing pages.

Sturmhufe was as white as chalk. Burghart was sweating in three languages. Möh had held up a sign that simply read:

"WITHOUT WORDS."

Bartholomew stood in the middle of the room. On his face was a mixture of tiredness, relief, and that very special spark of

"I suspect this isn't the end."

The writing on the ceiling was still pulsating.

****“DEMONWARE INSULATED.”**

SYSTEM IS UNSTABLE. REALITY IS BEING RESTARTED...“**

Sturmhufe immediately shrieked:

"STARTED OVER?! WILL EVERYTHING BE DELETED? WHAT ABOUT MY DOCUMENTS?! MY APPLICATIONS?! MY EMAIL DRAFTS THAT I WILL NEVER SEND?!"

Burghart nearly fainted. "RESTART?? That means—that means... developer state! OH GOD!! We're going to end up back in the tutorial! I can't stand any more tutorials!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"Autosave?"

Bartholomew raised a hand and calmed her.

"Don't panic. It's... more of a soft reboot. Not a reset."

Burghart snarled: "AM I A DAMN SMARTPHONE OR WHAT?!"

Stormhoof desperately clutched Bartholomäus' sleeve. "Can you stabilize it? Just a little? Otherwise... otherwise I'll have to do those internal online training sessions again!!"

The Möh raised a sign:

"NO, NOT THE TRAINING COURSES!!"

Bartholomew concentrated. He sensed the new right. The power. And above all, the responsibility, which settled over his shoulders like a heavy, somewhat sticky coat.

He opened the cosmic menu again.

This time a tab opened that he had not seen before:

****“Bureaucratic residual waste identified”**

REORGANIZING SIDE PROCESSES? YES / NO"

Bartholomew guessed YES.

A deep breath went through the entire building, as if the office itself had just relaxed its shoulders.

Monitors adjusted themselves, cables tucked away neatly, printers stopped muttering, applications stopped climbing each other, and a router surprisingly said:

"Ah. Thank you."

Sturmhufe stared. "He... spoke."

Burghart whispered: "HE SOUNDS MORE CONTEXTUAL THAN THE USERS..."

The Möh raised a sign:

"IT'S STARTING AGAIN?"

The writing on the ceiling changed:

****“REALITY REORGANIZED**

MONDAY WILL BE FINISHED PROGRESS: 99%**

Sturmhufe held his breath. Burghart closed his eyes. The Möh held up a sign:

"NOW IT GETS EPIC."

Bartholomew took a step forward.

"Final confirmation," he murmured. "Then Monday is over."

He typed.

The ceiling glowed. The floor vibrated.

And then — a warm light. A gentle pulsing.

****“MONDAY END.”**

PARTIAL SUCCESS. RESIDUAL ERRORS SAVED. WELL DONE, ADMINISTRATOR.**

Burghart took a sharp breath. "PARTIALLY?! What does PARTIALLY mean?!"

Sturmhufe shouted: “Residual errors?! What kind of errors?! Where?! Why?!”

The Möh raised a sign:

"CAN WAIT."

Bartholomew relaxed his shoulders.

It was over.

At least for now.

A bell could be heard in the distance.

A perfectly ordinary bell.

The end-of-work bell.

Burghart looked at his watch. "It's... Wednesday evening."

Sturmhufe smiled wearily. "Hump day."

The Möh raised a sign:

"KIOSK."

Bartholomew nodded.

“Yes... we deserve it.”

The kiosk smelled of cold beer, warm asphalt, and the sweat of people who had experienced too much and been paid too little for it.

Bartholomew downed his first beer like a man who had just dusted off the damned universe.

Burghart swore in three languages at once. Sturmhufe laughed too loudly, shot beer up his nose, and Möh scribbled on the backs of cigarette packs.

They swore. They drank. They laughed like madmen. They cursed the network, the office, DemonWare, Wednesday, reality, the cosmos, and all the goddamn printers of this goddamn existence.

And Bartholomew felt —for a moment — that maybe all this crap did make sense after all.

At least with enough beer.

As they finally parted ways, staggering, laughing, cursing, Bartholomew lingered for a moment.

He looked up at the sky.

And there — way up high — in a small, barely visible break in reality — something flickered.

An icon. A small one. A tiny one.

"UPDATE AVAILABLE".

Bartholomew sighed.

"Naturally."

He turned around, put his hands in his pockets and started for home.

Because Monday was over.

But the madness?

He stayed.

Always.

And the universe...was already waiting for the next click.

imprint

This book was written under the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) License.



This license allows others to use and share the book for free, as long as they credit the author and the source of the book and do not use it for commercial purposes.

Author: Michael Lappenbusch

E-mail: admin@perplex.click

Homepage: <https://www.perplex.click>

Year of publication: 2025