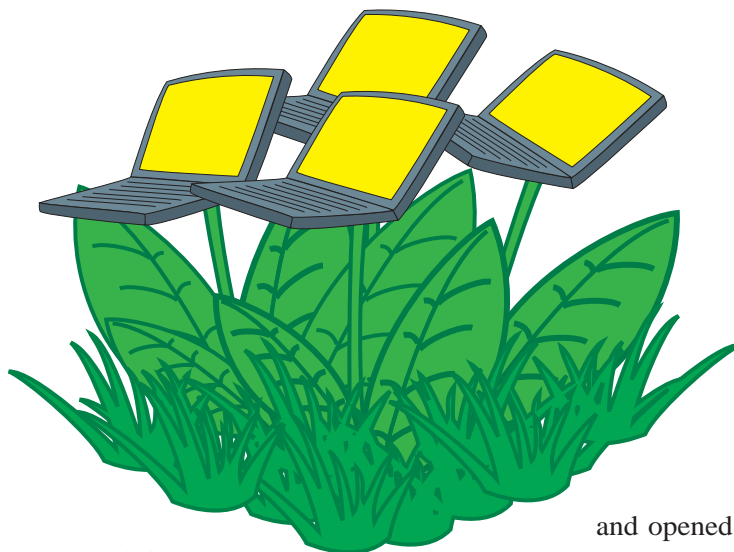


1,000 Windows Bloomed



I hate. I hate with a white-hot fervor that will never fade. I want the people responsible for my hatred to die a lingering death for what they have done to my computer. Let their death mirror that of my Dell, starting with a few obnoxious outbreaks and ending with a complete system shutdown. I want them to lose their guts, little by little, until a all that is left of them is worms.

I just went through two weekends in which time had no meaning. Minutes stretched into hours and then into days as I laboured in a fugue state to save my friend, to no avail. He is dead, infected with violent pop-ups. And for what? What had he done to deserve this creeping, revolting demise? He had existed simply to serve, my little pal, to do a job without complaint, to make life easier for us who owned him. My boxy buddy—goodbye! Your death shall be avenged! I swear it! I just have to get my hands on your mur-

deres. Jerks! Digital zombies! My curse upon you all!

It started about a month ago. A blue window appeared on my screen. It was flashing, which is always a bad sign in Cyberville. The alert stated that my system was possibly invaded by spyware and that I should click on the OK button to scan for problems. I'm not a fool. I did not click. I am aware that viruses, like vampires, must be invited across the threshold to gain entry.

Over the next few days, the blue window kept reappearing. I ignored it. But you can't wish this kind of thing away, any more than you can keep an upper-respiratory infection from striking you on a flight full of coughing travellers.

I am now aware that my Microsoft Internet Explorer had been "hijacked" by some kind of Trojan horse, which planted itself in the operating system

and opened the door to all kinds of smarmy pop-up marketers. At some point it's possible that somebody did click on the insidious OK button, I'm not sure. It's tough to recall what you've done when you see window after window, often teeming with pornographic images, cascading toward you.

So much of our lives was on that computer: Stories. Poems. Photographs. Correspondence. Saved Sims, who now die with the rest of our data.

After a while, my itty-bitty buddy creaked to a halt. Gigabytes of disgusting spyware had jammed the hard drive. And still the blue screen importuned me. I tried to eradicate Explorer and live by AOL alone, to no avail. For some reason, Explorer would not be expunged.

I went to Best Buy and purchased something called Spy Sweeper, which promised to

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help eradicate cookies, sprites, wafers, and tidbits that gum up your system. The Norton was clunky and slow and inscrutable to me—it kept presenting windows that offered choices I did not understand. The Sweeper, on the otherhand, was lean and nimble. It scanned my friend and pronounced that he was suffering from more than 250 viruses and some 2,000 traces of spyware seeping through my innards. I expunged them all, and felt much better.

Then up popped Mr. Window again. And then another. Hmm, I thought, and ran the fix-it program again. Whoops. It found 25 viruses and 350 or so footprints of associated dreck. Blew those off. Back they came. I had now spent the best part of a day cursing, yelling, damning the morons—wherever they were, whoever

they were—who had caused this disaster.

I took my friend to Best Buy and left him there. The diagnosis cost about \$75. They kept him for about two weeks. I picked him up yesterday and gave them \$75 more. The situation was much better. The blue window didn't show up for at least ten minutes. Six hours later I was still scanning, expunging. Spy Sweeper swept, finding more weevils. Ads for Dell, for



escort services, for bogus software flew in my face. Windows XP ran as if it were stuffed with seaweed. The smell of death hung about like the scent of bad cheese.

I heard the other day that a community near here drained one of its ponds to clean it out for the summer. At the bottom, in the mud and leaves, there was what appeared to be a perfectly good computer, with screen and keyboard, that someone had thrown into the water. Last year I might not have understood why someone would do such a thing. Now I do.

There are lots of people I guess I could blame—Microsoft, for leaving a back door into Explorer that made all this possible; Best Buy, for giving me back a box that still had issues—but I don't. They, too, must be counted among the victims of the walnut brains who are out there wreaking havoc. If I could air out their skulls with a ball-peen hammer, I would. But I can't. All I can do is my little part to make this kind of thing less likely.

I'm getting a Mac.