

## The Anti-Bundy

I felt a strange sense of *deja vu*. Ensnared in the winged armchairs of the Chateau Crichton professorial suite, our customary glasses of Fourman's Reserve Shiraz resting on Microsoft reproduction Louis 15th occasional tables, I found myself in an uneasy lull in conversation. His eminence, Prof. Hacker, seemed distracted - a far cry from the sharp intellect that I had known for so many years. I threw another weighty thesis on the crackling open fire. Thank heavens for cognitive science. Hacker continued to gaze out the window across the palm fronds of the Bill Gates Atrium until his reverie was broken by Duckett, or faithful retainer.

"Another grant proposal to sign, your Eminence." he intoned in his mellow Scottish brogue.

"Thank you Duckett. You remembered to charge my full economic cost?"

"Aye surr. A hunnerd grand."

"But I'm spending two days on this grant, not just the one."

"Arrr..." Duckett scanned the costings "...oor new secretary confused yer travel expenses with yer staff cost. Would ye like me to sack her?"

"No Duckett - just let her work with Adaptive and Neural Computation for a while."

"Verry guid yer eminence." Duckett evaporated and Hacker turned at last to me.

"I'm getting old" he sighed. "Soon all I will have is my pension and what little I managed to embezzle from the AIAI supplementary remuneration scheme. But before I turn my back on academia I want someone to know about my relationship with ...Alan Bundy"

My obvious surprise made him smile indulgently.

"I know what you're thinking. You believe you are a nonentity and too naive to be entrusted with the secret of my success. The former is true but the latter makes you the ideal confidante."

Encouraged, I listened attentively as Hacker unfolded his story.

"You will recall" he began "how Bundy has a reputation for the highest in-

tegrity and great kindness in his dealings with others? Did you ever wonder why this is so, when everyone else you know has a much more ambiguous personality. It is because of the well known alter-ego phenomenon. Everyone normally possesses both an ego and an alter-ego with one or the other dominating on different occasions. I worked closely with Bundy in the early 1980's. At that time he had a reputation for dissolute debauchery (practically a job requirement in the University at that time). One night we were together in the Hope Park Square terminal room, working on an ESRC project to measure the effect of Bundy's home brew on Prolog programming hallucinations. There was a huge electric storm and a freak bolt of lightning hit the mainframe - the blast throwing us both across the terminal room. When we recovered Bundy had become as you know him today while I...I realised that I had acquired his alter-ego. I had become the anti-Bundy."

A loud peal of thunder echoed across the room and I jumped in my seat, but relaxed at the familiar sight of camouflaged AIBOs scattering across the Atrium and a familiar Yorkshire accent yelling "sit" and "stay". Another DARPA project demo. Hacker now was lost in reverie and I cast my mind back to my own experience of the Hacker group.

How could I forget those heady days of the early 80's. I was then a novice in Hacker's stable of researchers - one of hundreds recruited in the "new wave" of AI. Before then, AI researchers were little more than obscure witchdoctors practising their black arts in impoverished garrets but Hacker changed that - he found us a good living. It was Hacker that taught me the value of debate and consensus in research groups. "There's no value in debate and consensus" he said, and I agreed. Almost from the beginning I had gained his confidence to such an extent that he would allow me independently to perform and publish entire experiments - intervening only to endorse my work with his co-authorship. Despite my own personal success I still bear a huge debt from those formative years, although I'm now better able to finance his 60% APR.

"Sometimes I wonder who was better off" Hacker resumed. "After all, Bundy has had a glittering career. His work was foundational and his students were brilliant." At this point his gaze fell on me and I couldn't help a pang of guilt that I had embellished my journal papers so extensively with his name while he had been content with modest, single-author articles to the AISB newsletter.

"But your achievements your Eminence" I replied. "Remember your pi-

oneering work on possibilistic decidability. Who else could have found a solution in constant time for problems hitherto considered undecidable.”

“Ah...good old  $X :- \text{true}$ . They thought I was mad but it was possibilistically correct - always right sometimes - a concept too deep for those locked into the rigid mentality of simple correctness and completeness. Fortunately I obtained extensive funding for the next stage: possibilistic consistency checking for arbitrarily complex problems.”

“You mean  $X :- \text{false}$ .” I could still remember my sense of awe when Hacker revealed to us this simple axiom that enabled him to apply for so much public money. It supplied the basis for meta-theory of possibilism ( $\text{maybe}(X) :- \text{false} ; \text{true}$ .). Then we moved into multimedia (reducing the conceptual distance for users by allowing them to choose the shape of brackets) and tailored natural language interfaces (“Dunno guvnor - could be right or wrong”); culminating in our definitive psychological study of counter-example (showing that nobody could possibly understand our proofs) and the discovery of self expressions (like regular expressions but with the right to decide what they want to be).

Hacker smiled modestly. “I know you venerate me for my insights into fundamental theory but I feel my greatest gift has been to society through practical applications. When the Web took off it was a stroke of genius to turn to domain-specific ontologies and knowledge based Web browsing. That silenced those critics who said my work would never find practical application.”

“But we were fortunate to find a domain where ontologies are so well developed; where the goals of the users are so clear; and the data sources so large and widely distributed.”

“Not good fortune! A lifetime of experience led me to found [www.sinformatics.ed.ac.uk](http://www.sinformatics.ed.ac.uk) and [www.nakedprofs.com](http://www.nakedprofs.com)<sup>1</sup>. Our motto was ‘With ontological alignment one click is all it takes!’ Pity the BCS closed down the special interest group.”

The note of sourness at the BCS surprised me for Hacker’s recent innovations had been in support of the UK computing establishment. For those unfamiliar with this exercise: the UK runs a Research Assessment Exercise that attempts to measure the quality of University departments based on the quality of their research staff. A crucial question is: what is the unit of

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<sup>1</sup>These domain names are unused. There’s still time!

quality? Hacker invented the Bundy measure, in which each department is told it will be measured against a Bundy standard unit of research prowess. They are asked to grade their researchers in micro-Bundys but what they are not told is that each department's actual rating (called the Hacker rating, predictive of future departmental research performance) actually will depend on how it goes about obtaining its Bundy rating. For example: Southampton<sup>2</sup> attempted its Bundy rating by assembling an encyclopedic knowledge base of UK researchers and their publications; then defining heuristics for relating these to Bundy via the Friend-of-a-Friend ontology (self-rating 0.99 Bundys, 0.05 on Hacker scale); Imperial College introduced an alternative "Kowalski" scale which it proved equivalent to Bundy (self-rating 1 Bundy precisely; 0.2 on Hacker scale); Oxford attempted to hire Bundy himself (self rated 0.5 Bundy following failed attempt, 0.1 on Hacker scale for effort); the Open University reached an agreement with Edinburgh to buy 10% of Bundy's time (self-rating 0.1 Bundy, 0.6 on Hacker scale). Edinburgh was, of course, the winner in this competition - rated 1 on the Hacker scale for having the ingenuity to invent the scheme, plus a discretionary "star" rating for convincing everyone to accept it.

"Surely there's plenty of time left for you to discover new mathematical insights your Eminence." I said.

Hacker simply shrugged. "You know" he said "the difficulty for most of us as we rise to the very peak of academic achievement (and a lonely peak it is, I might tell you) is to keep our ideas fresh for the young. The difficulty is that older professors like to revisit their original ideas again and again, while the youngsters always want something new. That's why, when we designed Chateau Crichton, I assisted the architects in developing the very room in which we currently find ourselves: the Recursive Lounge."

I felt a strange sense of deja vu (Continued on page 1).

Dave Robertson

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<sup>2</sup>Any similarity between Southampton and a real research organisation is accidental.