

## XP recovery and fairies in the garden

As you may know by now, I am a staunch supporter of Open Source alternatives to the hegemony of Microsoft. After this week I'm an even bigger supporter for I innocently agreed to 'sort out' our builder's PC, a new Time Windows XP Home machine which had gone the way of so many Microsoft machines and now could only tantalisingly reach the log-on phase before crashing each time. I can't believe what followed and wondered if Microsoft ever factor this kind of appalling waste of time into their FootballMath computations of return on investment. I presume not.

First, the machine warned me quite correctly that it had not been shut down properly and recommended a scan so I let it. Half way through, the scan hung. I tried again, this time it hung in a different place. Subsequently it always hung at the same place. Only a really Mickey Mouse system can't even scan its own discs let alone repair them. You will like this bit. At the suggestion of my son, I removed the disc, put it in a firewire caddy and connected it to his Macintosh. The Mac had no trouble reading it so at least we were able to back up important files on one of the Mac discs.

Things kind of went downhill from here. It was obvious that the XP machine would have to be reformatted, but, no disc, just a bar code on the back with the XP Home reference number, so a phone call to Time who promise a copy for 'a small additional fee'. This turns out to be 70 quid, a definition of small I haven't previously come across but they point out you do get it free if you take out the 5 year extended rip-off option, so that's all right then. They should be ashamed of themselves. So given that our builder has paid for a licence and so have I, I used my disc and his number and managed at last to reformat the disc. Only about another 20 hours to go.

Now you have to start on the upgrades, service packs, security add-ons and so on to make this definitively underwhelming operating system modestly secure. This takes just about all Saturday afternoon. Then its time for Norton anti-virus which after being installed now tells us that it is taking over the security and will therefore disable the Windows warnings so we don't get them twice, (how do I know if Norton disables Windows from doing something that Norton cannot do ? Answer, I don't). At this point, Zone Alarm (which my son prudently loaded off-line before starting all this shenanigans) informed us that it had blocked 54 intrusion attempts of which one was considered severe. These occurred just while trying to update Windows.

So finally, we must reinstall 7 Gb of backed up files knowing full well the machine will probably succumb again within weeks. Norton then has to scan everything taking another small Ice Age. I have NEVER had to do this with Linux. My son has NEVER had to do this with OS X. Why do we still have to do it with Windows ? Will it ever get better ? Of course it will. Do you know there are fairies in our garden ? No, really.

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