

# **Psychopathology of Everyday Things**

## **Pathological designs**

**Many human errors result from design errors**

**Human factors**

James Tam

## **Back In 41 B.C.**

**Head Goucho is tired of loosing to the Gauls**



James Tam

Advisor Determines The Problem...  
And Intuitively Finds A Solution

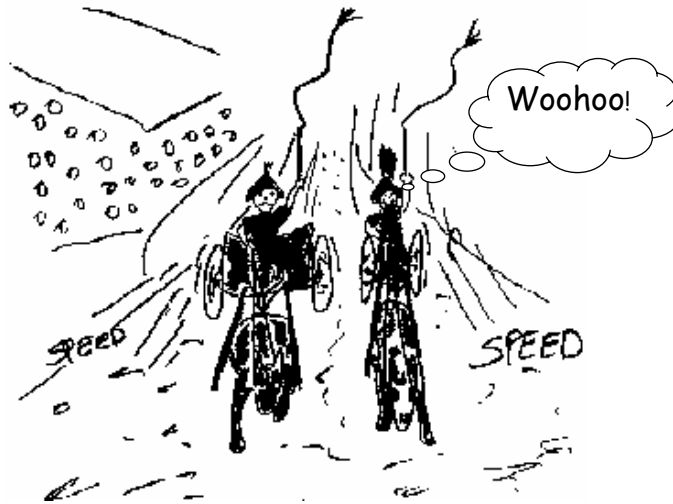
Hmmm.....  
AHA!  
The Wind!



James Tam

Chariot Race, 40 B.C.

Notice the aerodynamic efficiency of the faster chariot

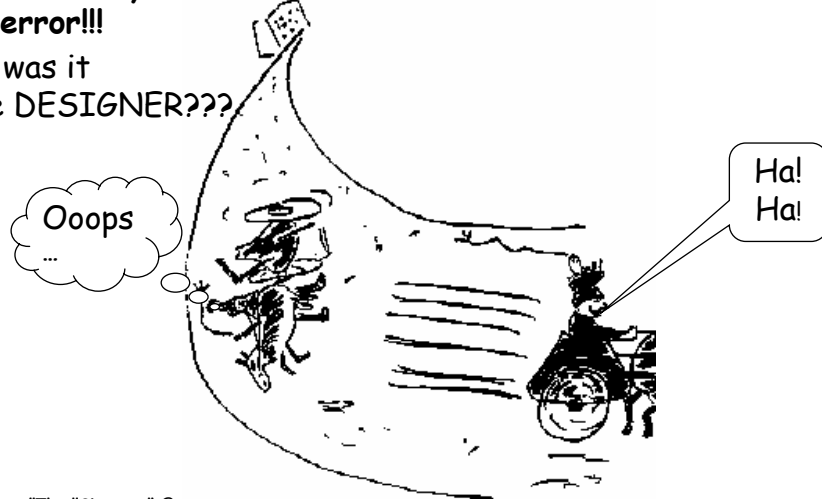


James Tam

## Oops...Did I Forget Something???

But, in maneuvering for position on the turn, the DRIVER makes an error!!!

Or was it the DESIGNER???



Wav files from "The Simpsons" ©  
Twentieth Century Fox Home Video

James Tam

## Human Factors Engineered Chariot

(Boadiceaised as well)



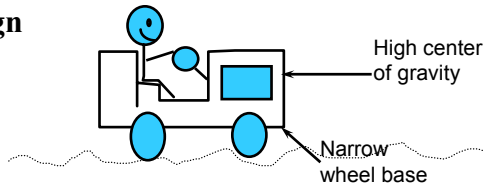
James Tam

## Early Tractors

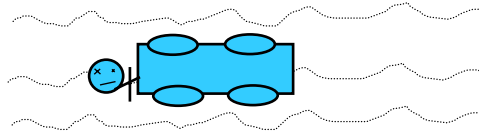
### Original design

### Terrain

- Un-surfaced
- Rough
- Hilly



### Result



Used to be called “**Driver’s Error**” but accidents are now infrequent as designs now have low center of gravity, wider wheel bases

James Tam

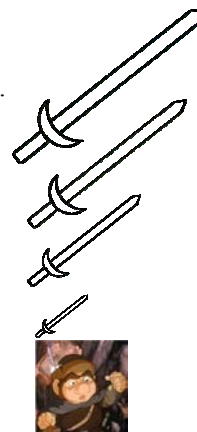
## Human Factors

### Lesson 1

- Most failures of human-machine system are due to poor designs that don’t recognize peoples’ capabilities and fallibility's.
- This leads to apparent machine misuse and “human error”.

### Lesson 2

- Good design always accounts for human capabilities.



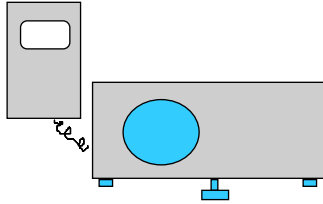
Images from “The Lord of the Rings (1978)” © Warner Home Video

James Tam

## Other Pathological Examples:

### **Remote control from Leitz slide projector**

- How do you forward/reverse the slideshow?

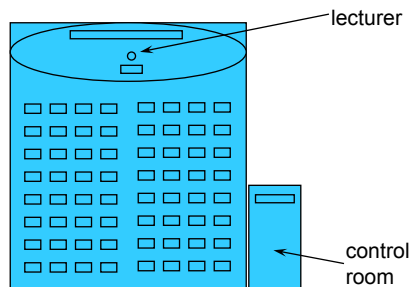


James Tam

## Other Pathological Examples:

### **Amphitheater Louis-Laird in Sorbonne**

- Beautiful room with murals on ceiling
  - Murals are right side up only for lecturer!
- Electric projection screen
  - Controls in other room out of sight of screen!

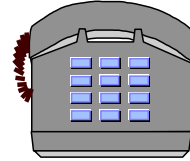


James Tam

## Still More Pathological Examples

### Modern telephone systems

- Standard number pad
- Two additional buttons \* and #



### Problem

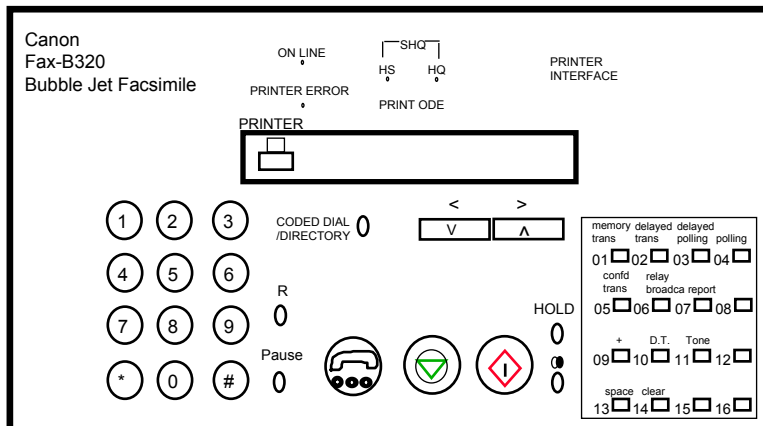
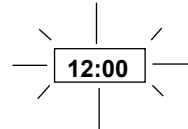
- Many hidden functions
- Operations and outcome completely invisible
  - \*72+number = call forward
    - Can I remember that combination?
    - If I enter it, how do I know it caught?
    - How can I remember if my phone is still forwarded?
  - Ok, I'll read the manual
    - But what does "call park" mean? what's a link?
    - Where is that manual anyway?

James Tam

## Still More Pathological Examples

### VCR's, camcorders, fax machines, ...

- Most people learn only basic functions
- Some people refuse to go near them (sounds familiar?)
- Most functionality goes untouched



James Tam

## Getting Serious About Designing For People

### **Started during the second World War**

- Invention of machines (airplanes, submarines...) that taxed people's abilities to control them
- Even after high degree of training, frequent errors (often fatal) occurred



Spitfire photo from the Historical aircraft collection <http://www.historicaircraftcollection.ltd.uk>

James Tam

## Getting Serious About Designing For People (2)



Spitfire cockpit from the Historical aircraft collection <http://www.historicaircraftcollection.ltd.uk>

James Tam

## Getting Serious About Designing For People (3)

### Example airplane errors:

- If booster pump fails, turn on fuel valve within 3 seconds
- Tests showed it took at least five seconds to actually do it!



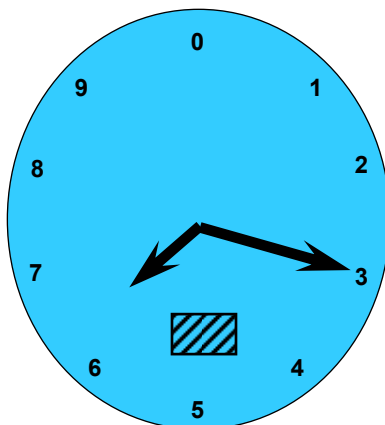
### Result

- Human factors became critically important

Photos from "Great Weapons of World War II"

James Tam

## What Is The Altitude?



- Early days (< 1000'):
  - Only one needle needed
- As ceilings increased over 1000'
  - Small needle added
- As they increased beyond 10,000'
  - Box indicated 10,000' increment through color change

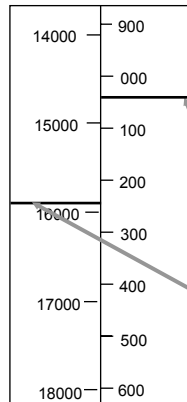
 < 10,000'

 > 10,000'

James Tam



## An Alternative Altimeter (Tape)



**Human factors test showed that this altimeter:**

- Eliminated reading errors
- Faster to read

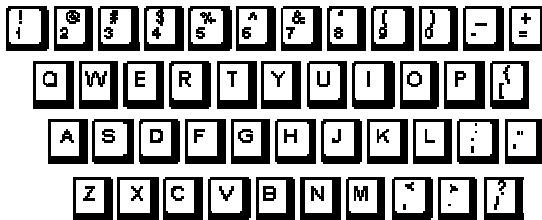
**But not in standard use! Why?**

Reference lines (independent movement)

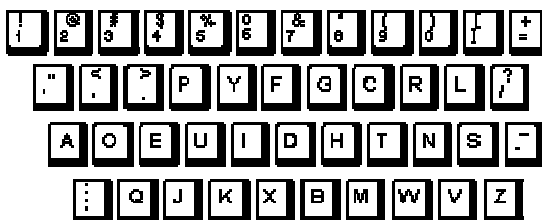
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## A Design That's Resistant To Change: Computer Keyboards

Qwerty

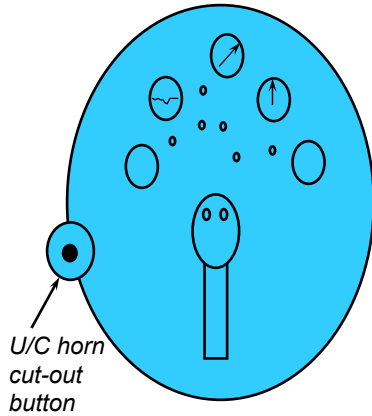


Dvorak



James Tam

## The Harvard Control Panel: Problems During Training



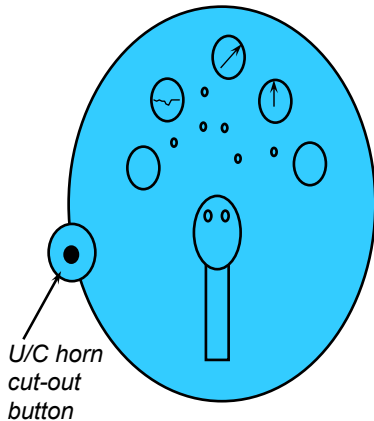
Problem #1: Conditioned response  
Stall -> push button; therefore stimulus nullified

Wav from Star Trek © Paramount Pictures

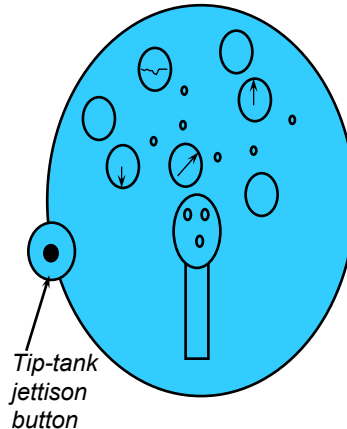
James Tam

## The Harvard Control Panel: Problems In Actual Flights

The Harvard Control Panel



The T-33 Control Panel



Problem #2: Negative transfer  
T-33's: tip-tank jettison button in same location

James Tam

## Differences Between The Designer And Operator



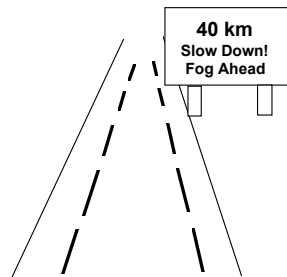
Darn these hooves! I hit the wrong switch again!  
Who designs these instrument panels, raccoons?

James Tam

## The Psychopathology Of Computers

**Britain has (had) a Motorway Communications System  
operating 40% of it's highways**

- The system receives control information from Police
  - Changes lane signs, direction signs, speed limits, etc
  - Occurs on the motorway itself in real time
- On December 10th 1976, police, using the system, failed to change the speed limit signs when fog descended
  - 34 vehicles crashed
  - 3 people were killed
  - 11 people were injured and trapped in their vehicles for several hours
  - Motorway closed for 6.5 hours



James Tam

## Some Quotes From The Investigation

### **Police (at inquest)**

- “The system did not accept the instruction”

### **Dept of Transport (after examining computer activity logs)**

- “There is no evidence of technical failure”

### **Designers of system**

- Emphasized that they have no responsibility for the system:
  - “We supplied it over 5 years ago and we have never been called to look at that problem”



James Tam

## Example Problems With The System

### **Cryptic input codes, error-prone**

- Example: XR300/1
  - “Change (X) sign 300 on highway M5 (R) to code 1”
  - i.e., change particular sign to indicate fog condition

### **Cryptic error messages**

- “Error code 7”

### **Teletype machine was old, text illegible**

- No feedback
  - People could not see what they entered into system, or system’s reply

### **Operator overloaded with other chores**

- Also handled radio and telephone traffic

James Tam

## ...The Ruling Of The Coroner's Court

**After examining the evidence it was determined “operator error” was the cause of the accident**

- The police operator
  - “Failed to follow written instructions for entering the relevant data”

James Tam

## Another Computer Psychopathology

**From *Science* magazine**

- In 1988, the Soviet Union's Phobos 1 satellite was lost on its way to Mars, when it went into a tumble from which it never recovered.

“Not long after the launch, a ground controller omitted a single letter in a series of digital commands sent to the spacecraft. And *by malignant bad luck*, that omission caused the code to be mistranslated in such a way as to trigger the [ROM] test sequence [that was intended to be used only during checkout of the spacecraft on the ground]”



James Tam

## When An Obsolete Design Proved To Be Best



Photos from "Great Weapons of World War II"

James Tam

## When An Obsolete Design Proved To Be Best



Photos from "Great Weapons of World War II"

James Tam

## A Very Old Joke: The PC Cup Holder

### **A True (?) Story from a Novell NetWire SysOp**

Caller: "Hello, is this Tech Support?"

Tech Rep: "Yes, it is. How may I help you?"

Caller: "The cup holder on my PC is broken and I am within my warranty period. How do I go about getting that fixed?"

Tech Rep: "I'm sorry, but did you say a cup holder?"

Caller: "Yes, it's attached to the front of my computer."

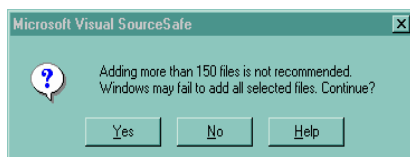
Tech Rep: "Please excuse me if I seem a bit stumped, it's because I am. Did you receive this as part of a promotional, at a trade show? How did you get this cup holder? Does it have any trademark on it?"

Caller: "It came with my computer, I don't know anything about a promotional. It just has '4X' on it."

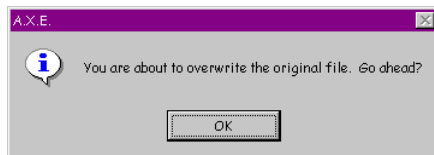
At this point the Tech Rep had to mute the caller, because he couldn't stand it. The caller had been using the load drawer of the CD-ROM drive as a cup holder, and snapped it off the drive.

James Tam

## Inane Dialog Boxes



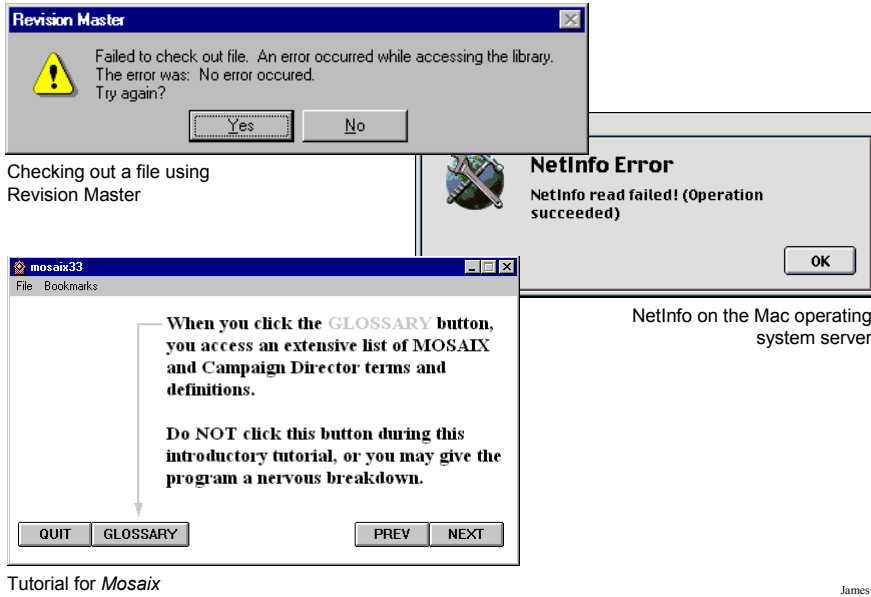
Umm, thanks for the warning, but what should I do? [Visual SourceSafe]



Do I have any choice in this? [AXE a hex editor]

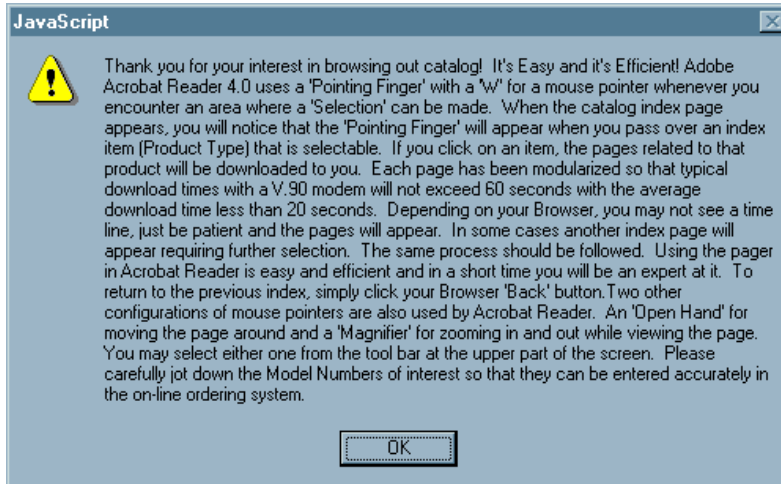
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## Inane Dialog Boxes (2)



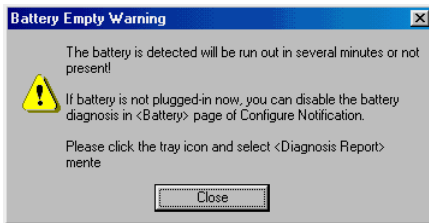
## Silly Help

Midwest Microwave's online catalog

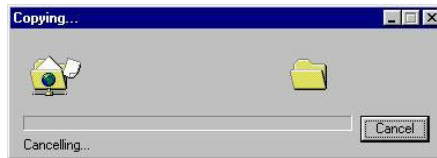




## A Few More...I Couldn't Resist.



A battery warning message for Saxum 8004 notebook computers

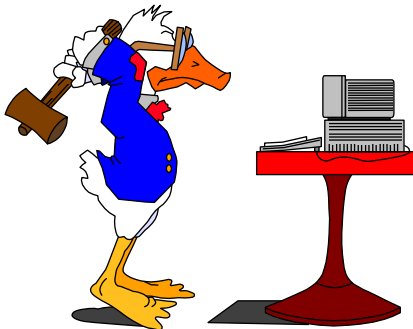


What happens when you cancel a cancelled operation? [Internet Explorer V5: FTP]



Confirmation message after unsubscribing from an unwanted mailing list.

James Tam



**“HIT ANY KEY TO CONTINUE”**

James Tam



James Tam

### You Should Now Know

- **How and when did the need for the study of Human Factors arise**
- **How good designs consider the operator's capabilities and weaknesses**
- **Why some designs are regarded as being pathological**
- **How designs should be situation specific**

James Tam