

Hacks

"Hack" is a difficult word to define at MIT. All hacks are practical jokes. The converse is rarely true. Here are some of the criteria under which hacks are judged ~~there~~ at the Institute:

- 1) No major destruction of property
- 2) Original, creative (good hacks are usually not repeatable)
- 3) Are inherently clever
- 4) Show quick and good planning, organization and implementation
- 5) Outrageous, absurd
- 6) Teaches people to laugh at themselves, makes stuff start and/or
- 7) Probably illegal
- 8) Technical, often a science-engineering in joke
- 9) Large scale
- 10) Releases lots of tension

Bexley Missile

^d
An ~~ESG~~ ^{friend} moved into a new apartment and found a missile in the backyard. It was really a war surplus airplane attachment and had once been used as a sign for a war surplus store. It looked like a real missile. Foxvog and I went to investigate, riding on my tandem bicycle. Although it was long (13 feet) it was relatively light (120 lbs.). We decided we could transport it strapped onto the tandem, ~~8x~~ with one of us on either side pushing it, Viet-Cong style. It attracted a lot of attention. Just before we would have to go in front of the Cambridge Police Headquarters, a van stopped to help. Foxvog and the missile hitch hiked to Bexley. Plans to install an engine, guidance system, and small nuclear warhead fell through when we decided the government might resort to extralegal means to stop our "Brooklyn Project". Instead it has been used as a centerpiece of anti-Shah demonstrations.

Piano Drop

Some MIT hacks are boorish and show bad taste. One dorm, mad because they couldn't get their old piano replaced, threw it off the roof with great fanfare. It made the yearbook.

One good hack that never made it

The MIT press people had a sign across Mass. Ave. saying "MIT PRESS BOOK SALE DEC. 4-5-6-7", ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ made up off letters strung together. Foxvog called up ESG and asked everybody to try to find a good anagram for it. In half an hour, the winner was " '75 MIT DOPE SALE-SCORE 64 KS". A crew arrived at 3 in the morning to cause the transformation. Unfortunately, the students on the top of the lamp posts noticed a steel cable that held the letters together. We didn't have the equipment on hand to unattach it, so the project was canceled.

Capture the Flag

x Once some Bexleyites decided to play capture the flag around the Institute buildings. It was repeated several times with elaborate flags, armbands, telephone hot lines, maps, walkie-talkies, other paramilitary paraphernalia. It was only interesting when one dorm was fighting another. It will never be a varsity sport.

DH

Dope Drop

A short time after we had dropped paper helicopters from the inside top ~~xxxxxx~~ of the small dome into the main lobby during a speech by Weisner, president of MIT, Holladay and I thought of a fantastic variation of the theme. A pound of inactive dope had been sitting around for a year which none could think of a use for (an extraction of active ingrediants had been tried with no success). Why not a dope drop! I created a ~~sp~~ multicolored sign with magic markers on computer paper that said /see margin/. The plan was to have the sign unfurl in the lobby and the dope to ~~xxxx~~ fall from the center of the dome at exactly noon. The sign was designed so that by releasing a piece of tape it would unroll from the third floor balcony to the floor. To be inconspicuous, it was placed behind an outdated sign, which was then removed. Someone found a megaphone that gives out a loud tone. We told many friends to be in building 7 lobby at noon no matter what ("you can go to that test 5 minutes late"). Just before noon we were all in our places, Holladay was looking down out a window in the top of the dome, Rich had crawled out on the ledge of the fourth floor with a megaphone, roommate Doug was non-chalantly standing next to the sign, and I was standing on the second floor balcony to synchronize them. At exactly 12:00, I chirped once and the sign was dropped, and a second time the megaphone blast went and the dope was dropped. People looked up to see it descending. It ended up in a 14'x16' oval in the center of the lobby. A huge crowd gathered at first a few feet away from the dope. Everyone in a while someone grabbed a handful, examined it and threw it back. Suddenly, everybody started scooping it up: secretaries putting it in their purses, students scooping it up with notebook paper, etc. One campus cop stationed himself at the top of the sign, unknowingly lending an air of officiality to the affair. A Cambridge cop was seen talking on a payphone. One good thing for the institute, the floor got cleaned. Half an hour later a dop lapped up the remnants.

Crypt

One of the favorite places of institute hackers was a partially finished room in the subbasement of building 9 affectionately called the crypt. It was big and out of the way and could be used to train an army without anyone noticing. In fact one January, a phone hacking course was ~~xxxxxxx~~ held there. In fall of 1972, half of it was taken over for the storage of videotapes. In the fall of 1973, the institute started to reclaim the crypt. New lock cylinders were put on the doors, which didn't matter because some people had master keys to that institute. A dead-bolt was put on the back door to prevent entry that way. This action was unpopular, the bolt was often mysteriously unbolted. The institute escalated and put a keyholeless cylinder on the back door, and a large metal plate between the double doors. This meant that only people who could convince the lock to open could get in. This action by the institute was uncalled for and was met with instant action: it was decided that the institute game of only letting those who have the appropriate key open the door should be played against them. A lock that they couldn't open would replace the one that they could. The institute has 5 "master" keys to open most of its doors, four of them identical except for the last pin. The lock was made with the following properties: The top plug would be turned by any of the four close to identical keys while the bottom plug would only turn with the fifth master key in it. However, even that wouldn't open the lock. Pieces from enough locks were used so that picking capability and other esoteric skills were demonstrated. They institute had to wrench out the lock to open the door.

D.F.

The Annual J. Edgar Hoover Memorial Dope Party

The annual J. Edgar Hoover memorial dope party is an MIT tradition. The day after J. Edgar Hoover died, sign went up around the institute that the following day, Friday May 5, 1972 would be the "First Annual J. Edgar Memorial Dope Party", in MIT's Great Court. It was attended by more than 100 students, several Cambridge narks, and 3 FBI agents. City police also watched the proceeding through binoculars. It is now a yearly event and the cops don't bother coming.

Radar Dish

One day at ESG, I heard some people walking on the roof, so I climbed out on top of the sash window and looked up on the roof to see what they were doing. I heard them talking about removing the WWII radar dish that was on top of the building. I called out to ask them what they were doing but couldn't get a straight answer from them since they were too busy being freaked out at a head and a set of arms appearing from over a 7 story high wall. I went back in and reported what they seemed to have been saying and it was decided that we should move it out that night. Opinion was almost evenly divided between placing it in the main lounge of Concourse, a rival alternative to the regular curriculum (Brand X), and on top of the small dome of MIT. It was finally agreed that it should go on the dome since more people would notice it. That night it was disassembled, trucked in pieces through the halls of the institute on loading carts, then taken up a freight elevator and up a stairway to the roof. A number of routes through the 'tute were used so as to avoid passing the same night janitor ~~xxxxxxx~~ twice with strange equipment. Once the material got to the dome, it was not taken up for several reasons: 1) the top of the small dome is made of glass brick and might not be able to hold the 700 pound radar dish (this is nonsense) 2) Things had been put on the dome before (e.g. shopping carts, a cow)-this is no reason not to give the dish the same level of attention and 3) it was drizzling and most of the people were wearing shoes ~~xx~~ and got no traction up the slope. It was set up in front of the dome, aimed at Westgate dorm. The whole operation from ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to setting it up took less than 12 hours.

the footsteps on the roof

D.F.

Some Old, Classic MIT Hacks

Streetcar:

Once streetcars went along Mass. Ave. A generation ago, dozens of students streamed in when one stopped in front of MIT. They went out the back and came in the front again. When the conductor was convinced that he had a small army in his car, he tried to start up, only to find that the car had been welded to the tracks with termites. They had to pick up the train and the car with a crane.

Kendall Sq. Train:

Once ~~x~~ students greased the subway where it goes above ground. The train didn't get out that morning for a while. A persistent story places a present dean as involved in the last two hacks.

Barber Pole:

One a student paid a barber to rent his barber pole. While carrying it, he was picked up by the police, hassled, and released. ~~x~~ An identically dressed student did the same. And then another. Finally the students monitoring the police radio heard what they were listening for: an All Points Bulletin ordering patrolmen to ignore students running with barber poles. The MIT archives has a ~~x~~ photo of the athletic field covered with Boston's barber poles. They were returned.

Model T:

Once a student left for a vacation with his model T parked in front of his dorm. He returned to find it perfectly assembled on the roof of his dorm.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Instant^{transient} clearance:

~~xxxxxxx~~ The most famous MIT computer hacking incident occurred in the early 1960's. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ The MIT telephone system is interconnected with other institutions with tie-lines. These other institutions are interconnected to other ones. Learning about tie-lines has always been an irresistible challenge to the ~~x~~MIT student. Some students programmed the legendary PDP-IV to systematically call these numbers. If a number started ringing it would hang up and record a dead end. If it waited, it would systematically follow every branch. One day, people in the Pentagon noticed that a phone would ring and then stop, the next phone down the hall would ring, and stop, and the next, and the next.. It was very suspicious. They traced it back to NORAD headquarters, then back to a military installation in ~~xxxx~~ California, and then to some schools and labs in Massachusetts, and finally back to the PDP-1 room in building 26 of MIT. An investigation revealed that the computer called a red telephone ~~x~~ at NORAD that was only supposed to ring in event of nuclear war. Fortunately, the computer immediately hung up. All the students involved were given instant Q (scientific) clearance, which was immediately ~~re~~inded. They could get in a lot of trouble if they revealed any of the numbers that they discovered. Even though they have tightened up on tie-line security, I was able to call general Westmoreland's Pentagon office from my dorm room in 1971.

D.H

The Ordeals of a Bexley Freshman

One Bexleyite didn't like his freshman roommate. Fortunately, the freshman knew what he was up against and always checked for tripwires. He found one connected to 3 sticks of pseudo-dynamite in his bed. He called the campus patrol who aided in his finding a new roommate. Unfortunately, the next one was just as bad.

The next roommate made an elaborate shackel which he chained to a 350 pound wrecking ball painted to look like a dunkist orange. An equally elaborate scheme attracted this freshman to building 7 lobby (main MIT enterance). He was waylaid by 7 Bexleyites who, after vicious struggle, chained him to the ball. At the time a choral group was performing in the lobby. The choral leader was upset at the disturbance and noting that the freshman was the center of attention, ordered him to leave. He pleaded that he couldn't, that he was chained to a 350 pound wrecking ball. After several minutes, she finally walked off in a huff, saying she would call the campus cops. The freshman pulled out his lockpicks from his pocket and tried to work on the locks. This was forseen, the locks were destroyed by nails and solder, preventing an easy escape. He finally dragged the ball across the lobby, down the steps (severally damaging one), across Mass. Ave. and into the Bexley courtyard. He parked the ball under his window, opened it, and reached in to his desk to get his hacksaws. A scuffle ensued as these instruments were taken from him. But it was decided that since he had shown such great resourcefulness that he deserved the hacksaws. The campus patrol came in with a boltcutter, ~~but~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ but he refused, ~~xxx~~ saying he would rather do it himself. Most of this was filmed in 16mm by someone in a movie course. The movie "Atool and his Ball" has become an underground MIT classic.

a

DA

The MIT student that got shafted

my roommate Doug and Fort & Felker

Two friends of mine, ~~Th~~ & ~~Z~~, while elevator-hacking one night, stopped an elevator between the 14th and 15th floors of MIT's tallest building. They got the door of the floor below them open. ~~Fort~~ slipped out through the crack between the elevator floor and the top of the outside door and dropped to the floor. ~~Doug~~ tried to follow but accidentally started swinging and was flung into the shaft by the pendulum motion. Fortunately, there were insulated electric cables hanging from the bottom of the elevator which he was able to grab onto (although he suffered severe rope burns) and stop himself after falling 3 floors. ~~Fort~~ was able to ~~see~~ to swing over and unlatch the door but couldn't pry it open while still hanging on the cable. So ~~Fort~~ ran down to the 11th floor and let him out. The medical department listed the cause of injury as "~~cable burns~~".

burns by wire

D.F.

Dome Drop

Getting onto MIT's great dome has always been a primary hacker's goal. One has to convince an elevator to open, go up into the engineering library when it ~~is~~ is closed, unlock a door, unscrew a window and climb up a ladder supplied by your logistics crew. In Nov. 1971, I was on top of the great dome (different from the small dome, which is trivial) with 2 other persons when the ladder blew down. It was the night before Thanksgiving, the campus was empty and we were trapped. There was a drop of at least 20 feet, a ledge and a wall, then a ~~xxx~~ 3 story drop. I went to the edge, held the wrists of my 2 "friends" and let go. I hit a patch of ice that I hadn't seen and fell hard on ~~the~~ my right side. After a while I picked myself up, put up the ladder and cheered with my friends about our escaping without the campus cops finding out. We heard a scrapping sound, turned around to see the ladder falling down on us. If we hadn't heard it, we wouldn't have caught it and it would have brained us. After those two escaped we wandered (I limped) around the institute basements spreading double doors with a screwdriver.

Dome Line

Some time later I was part of a crew that installed a "dome line" (named for the MIT dorm line phone system) onto the great dome. We disconnected a bell from a library phone, and carefully wired an extension onto the top of the dome. Our original plans called for a phone booth there, but failing that, we turned a piece of ventilating ~~xxx~~ duct into an indestructable phone housing. We had a lot of fun calling people around the institute saying the call was from the great dome (in one case the called looked out of his window at us). Unfortunately the whole assembly was stolen the next day by a rival student group.

D.H.

Esquire

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

488 MADISON AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

(212) 644-5656

July 10, 1975

George Plotkin
M.I.T., Attn. Rm 56-232
Cambridge, Ma. 02139

Dear George:

I want to thank you, however belatedly, for sending all this material. I'm afraid very little besides the anti-rape device could be accommodated in our September issue, but we appreciated having it to pore over. I hope that this is everything and that we haven't mixed things up too much. If you find that anything is missing, let me know and I will search further.

Thanks again.

Yours,

Frumie Selchen

Frumie Selchen
Editorial Associate

P.S. Please thank Kevin for me.