

# Thursday's Throes

by Ben Rogers

Armoire is quite a pretentious word to throw around. The problem is that it lacks a suitable synonym. Fiancé is the same way. I called the furniture store the other day to demand some overdue customer service. I had to use the word 'armoire' in an aggressive, assertive way. That's difficult.

A while back my wife and I picked out a large ornate wardrobe or cabinet for our bedroom. When the deliverymen came to our house, they dropped it on the street on account of its largeness. Its ornateness contributed to its breakability.

I wasn't home at the time; my wife was. The deliverymen were embarrassed and promised to bring us a brand new one.

They returned a week later in their tall truck. And dropped that armoire too.

I wasn't home at the time. Large Ornate Wardrobe or Closet Number 2 sustained merely superficial damage, and, standing in front of our house as the neighbors looked on, my wife made a shrewd executive decision. She told the clumsy duo to just lug the busted thing into our bedroom once and for all and then never touch it again. We asked the company to give us a discount and to fix the armoire. They agreed, and dispatched a man to our house soon thereafter to document the damage with a digital camera. This was now the third appointment for which we'd had to skip work. The fourth appointment didn't come—the one where someone came to fix the armoire. All the thing really needed was some wood glue and touch-up paint. I didn't have the paint, though, only the glue.

Months went by. We have other things to worry about. One day I woke up and as I beheld the armoire I said to myself, *that thing is still broken*. That was the day I called the furniture store.

"You delivered an armoire to my house, actually a couple of armoires. Bla bla bla, armoire. Bla bla bla, disappointed in your company, bla bla bla, armoire armoire armoire."

"Sir, let me transfer you to Charlene in accounting. Please hold."

"This is Charlene!"

"Okay, hello, Charlene. Bla bla bla. Armoire?"

"Twice?"

"Twice."

"I'd like for you to talk to Chris about this, okay?"

"Mmm."

"Good afternoon—this is John—how may I direct your call?"

"Um—someone just tried transferring me to Chris. I have an armoire."

"Chris Matheson? Or Jenks?"

"What?"

"What?"

"Hold on, it's really loud. I'm on my cell. I'm walking over the freeway. I'll be on the other side in a second."

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“Walking over the freeway?”

“On a pedestrian overpass.”

“What? Really?”

The appointment with the armoire repairman was for Thursday at 4:30 p.m. I got home at 4:20. I was supposed to meet up with my wife and some friends at 5:30 across town, a 20 minute drive away. The repairman would probably take at least half an hour. I hadn't showered in a few days and needed to, but I couldn't just leave a note on the door: *I'm in the shower, come on in. Armoire, Ben.* I sat down at our new computer to wait.

The computer was in a coma. We'd decided to save some money by downgrading our internet service to a more sluggish modem speed, and the transition somehow left our blue company-issued modem discombobulated. Its array of LED indicators blinked in awkward, death-throe sequences. The cable guy came out to put it out of its misery and install a new one. Again, I wasn't home. My wife watched the guy work for over an hour, installing software and hardware on our computer to make everything compatible. There were, I was told, complications, which is why it took so long, I was told. I trust my wife.

Still, after all his effort and his tireless problem tackling, the guy took off prematurely. He had completed what he believed would be the very last step in the process. In order for his installation to take effect the computer had to be rebooted. He clicked “restart” and gathered up his tools, then told my wife that when the computer started again all would be in order and the internet would be ours, notwithstanding the longer downloading times of the cheaper service package. With that, he bid my wife good day, walked out the front door and jumped in his van. I wouldn't doubt it if his tires peeled out as he pulled away. When the computer flicked back to life, the screen was that noxious shade of blue—you've seen it: the upholstery in Bill Gates Lamborghinis is the same color.

There was also a cryptic error message in the pixilated, all-business font of MS-DOS. One of the configuration files, relied upon by the operating system in the way that planes rely upon wings, was missing or corrupted. We couldn't start

Windows, let alone glimpse the internet—which, thankfully, we continued throughout the ensuing ordeal to be billed for.

With a little time to kill as I awaited the armoire repairman, I got on my cell phone (we don't have a landline for the same reason we don't pay for high speed internet service) and called the computer's customer support hotline. Before I was given an opportunity to navigate the labyrinthine touchtone menus, I was treated to an disclaimer about all of the computer viruses and sundry ailments that are beyond both the expertise of the support staff and the warrantee of my computer. I was told by another recording that oftentimes a simple reboot of the computer will solve the problem. And if not, try contacting Microsoft directly via their website. I finally got a menu. I was told to enter my service tag number. I entered it carefully, using the miniscule keypad on my cell phone. Then I got a human being. He was polite and talked slowly. His Indian accent was thick.

“Can I please have your service tag number.”

I looked it up again and relayed the many digits.

“Thank you, sir. May I please have your phone number?”

He was unable to confirm that I was the valued customer I claimed to be because the phone number I gave him didn't jive with his records. I tried two other numbers unsuccessfully. Then I tried my office number.

“That is correct,” he said. My Speak-And-Spell used to say that.

The armoire guy rang the doorbell and my dog went nuts. Covering the phone, I got up and answered the door. I whispered 'hello' and pointed him in the direction of the bedroom. I was forced to say 'armoire.' So was he.

I resumed my call with customer support. But my dog followed the repairman and clawed at his pants.

My cell phone had a dead battery, so I had it plugged into the wall near the computer. I was tethered.

I begged the man on the phone to excuse me for a moment, then rushed off to grab my dog.

"Sorry about all this," I told the repairman. I was bent over, clutching the dog's collar. "I'll put her in her kennel. I'll be on the phone out there if you need anything. I can't hang up right now though. It's long distance to India."

"Yeah?"

"Sort of. It's customer support for my computer. The guy told me that's where he was."

"I've read about that. I forget what they're calling it."

"Outsourcing."

"Right."

When I got back to the phone, I was led step by brutally-dumbed-down step through three of the exact same operations I'd already tried on my own. They didn't help.

At one point during the troubleshooting conversation, the repairman emerged from the bedroom and asked me to inspect his handiwork. He'd mixed a few different wood stains to approximate the dark green, almost black, paint of the armoire.

I decided that my phone battery had by then stored up enough juice and so I unplugged it from the charger and followed him to the bedroom. Meanwhile, the customer support rep had me on hold to consult with someone else, a savvy supervisor I prayed.

"The color's fine," I told the repairman. "Go ahead and finish it."

Then, without so much as a warning beep, the phone died. Right there in my hands, like a beloved pet gerbil. The fragile strand linking Reno to India had been severed.

I plugged it back in a hurry—deluded by the hope that the connection might not be lost if power was restored fast enough. And the phone rang immediately. But it wasn't India calling. It was my wife.

"Hi, baby. How's it going?"

"Well, it's okay."

"Good. Hey, could you bring me some things when you come?"

"I'm going to be late. I haven't even showered yet."

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"Why?"

Armoire. India. Dead Gerbils.

"Well, when you do come, bring my black zip-up sweater, my brown leather belt—do you know where those are?"

"Ummm..."

"Oh, and a tampon."

I redialed the computer company. Apparently, there's a host of computer ailments outside the scope of the customer service I was about to receive from overseas, and if my computer was not responding properly I might want to try rebooting it. If not, I should consult the internet.

I waited for a human, wondering if they had any record of my last call, or if the guy I talked to earlier was still sitting at his console, a wraparound microphone nestled against his cheek as he talked me through a lengthy operation—my silence proof his instructions were foolproof and his English flawless.

The repairman came out again. He said he was done and that he wanted me to have a last look before he hit the road. (I now recommend doing this with all repairmen.) But I wasn't sure I could. I couldn't unplug the phone again; I wouldn't give up my spot in the switchboard queue.

"I'll just have to take your word. I'm sure it looks fine."

"Still on the phone, eh?"

"On hold actually. I don't want to miss it when somebody picks up."

"I'll take the phone. You go run and look. If someone picks up I'll stall them or something."

I handed him the phone. He waited on India. I inspected the armoire.

The repairman left. I tried to tip him five bucks but he declined.

I got another representative on the line. Eventually, after trying what his training told him was the last thing left to try, he assured me that my computer was very sick and that I needed the services of an expert—someone who might be

able to perform a specialized recovery routine wherein the hard drive is removed from the computer, its contents (my photographs, my writings, my financial records, my funny interactive movie featuring a disco-dancing George Bush) are salvaged and all of the software applications and the operating system are reloaded from scratch. We were way beyond Control-Alt-Delete at this point.

“We thank you for calling today, sir. As part of our ongoing commitment to customer satisfaction, might I ask you if you were satisfied with the service provided to you today?”

“It’s not your fault.”

“I’m sorry?”

“It’s not your fault.”

The horror.

I finally met up with my wife and friends. I walked in late and they were sitting around talking about how my brother-in-law’s ex-girlfriend had started dating his best friend, and how awkward and destructive that whole situation was. Then my friend Kylie told us that earlier in the day she’d paid a visit to a tenant of hers who was late in his rent. When no one came to the door, she unlocked it only to discover his 70-year-old body sprawled on the couch, buck naked. The television was on. It was a baseball game, she said. The man had blisters all over his body, which the police later explained were because of how long he’d already been dead. She doesn’t remember there being any odor—she said she ran out too quickly to know for sure.

Regardless, armoire is a pretentious word and I don’t like using it.