One Last Compile...

A Geek? Moi?

When people ask me what I do, I lie and say I'm a computer consultant. It sounds like I walk around in a white coat armed with a clipboard, peering at computers and putting little ticks or crosses next to their names on a list. I say 'consultant', and smile, but I'm old enough and wise enough by now to know the truth. Much as I hate the phrase, I'm a computer geek.

The first person to call me a geek was an American friend of mine at college. I was camped out in the basement PC room, teaching myself Borland Pascal. I ducked when Ira came in, because the gorgeous blonde girl who'd smiled at me about 3 weeks ago was back and maybe she'd need help. Ira would cramp my style. But he saw me. "Yo!" he bellowed across the room, "stop being a geek and come for a drink."

I looked up from my macro and frowned. "I am not," I informed him frostily, "a geek."

"Sure you are," said Ira cheerfully. "Geeks are people who prefer computers to people. Because they can control computers, but can't figure out people. Ergo, you're a geek. And I'm telling you, unless you start spending quality time away from this room, you're going to be a geek forever."

"But I'm an arts student!" I protested, prodding the space bar and wondering what had gone wrong. "I've read 'Hamlet', and D H Lawrence, and I used to get gold stars for my poetry in primary school. Geeks are all into Star Trek and writing compilers by hand in binary."

"Doesn't matter," said Ira. "The mere fact that you know that writing compilers by hand in binary is a bad thing signals you are a geek. And I know you've got all the Star Trek videos. I've seen them in your room."

"That doesn't prove anything," I said. "I just like to keep abreast of popular culture." I clicked the mouse button hopefully, but the PC was still frozen.

Ira snorted.

"Excuse me," said the gorgeous blonde. "I don't mean to interrupt. But if you do know a bit about computers, could you tell me why this disc won't work?"

"Sure," I said, charging around to her side of the room before anybody else could help. "Hmmm – you've got a PC disc here, this Mac only has an 800Kb normal disc drive and you need a Superdrive. And PC Exchange. So go to one of the PCs and mail it to yourself as an attachment, and then access your mail account from down here and save it on to the local hard disc. And it should work fine."

"Oh." she said blankly. "Er – thanks."

I beamed at her and returned triumphantly to Ira. He didn't seem impressed.

"Look," he said. "Please. Come for a drink. It's still not too late to get a life."

"Ira," I said. "I'm busy."

"Sheesh," he said. "Okay. But don't say I didn't warn you." He turned to the blonde girl. "Hi," he said, "Would you like to come for a drink with me?"

"Sure," she said. "I'd love to."

Ira's now back in the States, earning obscene amounts of money as a lawyer. He has a wife and a mistress. Meanwhile, I write Delphi code to try and pay off my overdraft. My mum tells people that I just haven't found the right girl yet. He was right, I am a geek. I do find people more difficult to figure out than computers, though sometimes, when I look at my compiler error results, I wonder if they're not both equally baffling. But one of these days I'm going to come across a gorgeous blonde who's desperate for a new Windows application, and is ready to love forever the guy who can deliver for her. "Relax," I'll say. "I'm a computer consultant. And I once read 'Hamlet', you know."