We're All Going to Burn in Hell

Call it bending the truth, call it white lies, call it efficiency—call me from Hades.

By Penn Jillette

"THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS" is the concept that allowed Woodward and Bernstein to do some pretty iffy things to bring down Nixon for believing "the end justifies the means." (Hey, I know from recursive; I've read *Godel, Escher, Bach.*) It doesn't hold water as a philosophical position, but we all live by it: The end of one more happy computer end user justifies the means of lying our asses off.

My dedication to computers is no secret. I write this damn back page (it mentions computers occasionally). On airplanes, I carry a painted Zen MastersPort, bright pink with a grinning devil that always makes the flight attendants smile and give me extra hickory-smoked nuts. I can work computers into any conversation ("Yeah, I guess I'm glad David Duke lost, too. He was a racist Nazi. But did you know he has one of the best-organized databases in politics?").

When friends or acquaintances decide that now's the time to get into computers (these are the same people who decide now's the time for Dylan to go electric), they talk to me.

The last person seeking advice was Robin Quivers, Howard Stern's radio and TV sidekick. I gave her the "religion rap": I said the choice between IBM and Apple was really an emotional, religious thing and that once people had bought a Mac or a PC, they committed to that camp and couldn't see the other side.

I, of course, could see both sides. I predicted the Apple People (intoned so it sounds like a synonym for *fruitcakes*) would explain *user friendly* and show her little Sesame Street pictures of trash cans and stupid thought-bubbles with sleeping Zs in them. I added that if she liked stupid user-friendly toys, she could put Windows into a PC (I didn't mention that I've had Windows for a few months and can't get it to work, at least not fast enough. But that's probably just me—I have only 8MB of RAM).

"We" concluded that since it didn't really make much difference, she should just go with what the people around her were using (I already knew that Howard and K-ROCK had PCs).

She worried that it was just too much to learn. I told her, in a grave voice, that for the first week she would be spending most of her time learning to use the computer and wouldn't get much work done. It must have slipped my mind that for the next year she would just be getting things set up right and then she'd be getting all new hardware and software, and that, after 257 weeks of using PCs, I felt I was really going to get some serious work done any minute now.

She said she worried about losing things she was writing. I told her that with "proper backup" (try to say that without laughing), electronic files are safer than paper. Which is true if you're scrawling on tissue on the edge of the Grand Canyon, in gale-force winds, without a paperweight, and the mighty Colorado is on fire.

She said she worried that it would break all the time. I just shrugged. I didn't think she needed to know that, at that instant, the new memory in my Dell was making something crash, my new Zen wouldn't talk to my desktop, and my Amiga wouldn't even boot up. That's why I had time for lunch.

She'll buy soon, and right after that, she'll turn someone else on to the wonders of computers. And they'll all end up happy. Using PCs is the greatest thing in the world, but she'll lie to get that person started.

I hope Tricky Dicky saves us a cool place in the brimstone—maybe we can set him up with a Kaypro for eternity. ◪

Penn Jillette is appearing Off-Broadway in Penn & Teller Rot in Hell.