

4. RTFM

He looked balefully at the inert white box with dials and that porthole on the front face. He imagined it mocking him with a one-eyed wink, smug with its imperviousness to his attempts to elicit a response.

Getting it out the box and packaging was bad enough, snowing with polystyrene beads like a mountain storm, and much swearing and cursing as he macheted his way through its cardboard armour. 'For fucks sake, you square shit!' he shouted at the white machine, spittle leaving his mouth like rats leaving a sinking ship. He kicked at it from his cross-legged position on the floor in front of it, only managing to lose his balance and crumpling sideways into a pile, like his resolve.

'An hour! A fucking hour trying to coax this appliance into life!' he thought to himself. Poking, pushing, prodding its facade and buttons like some crazed gambler on a one-arm bandit. No prizes yet, just sore fingers. He collected himself, stood up, as if he would be more imposing looming over the resolute box. He scratched his day old stubble, digging further back into his memory for any spark of inspiration. Nothing. As empty as a church collection box, not even the odd button someone had dropped into it instead of a coin.

'BASTAAARRRDDDD!!!' he raged, more rats escaping, raining on to the top of the white box. It was expensive, top of the range, even with 'AI', like everything these days. Some algorithms ensure your sweater didn't shrink to the size of a bra, or colour all your whites blue due to the errant new pair of jeans thrown in at the last minute. Admittedly, it didn't iron and fold your clothes, putting them away with machine grace, but it did notify you if the fabric conditioner had reached a homeopathic level.

All useless if it wouldn't turn on! He jiggled the box back and forth, side-to-side, the pair of them looking like a couple on their first dance at a school disco. Nothing. Though, was that something rattling, or his imagination. Jiggle again. Yes, he was sure there was a rattle. The type that defied locating in a second hand car. 'Fuckers have delivered a faulty one!' he hissed in his head. Well, damned if he was going to reject it and wait weeks for a replacement.

The toolbox weighed heavily and reassuringly as he set it down by the 'faulty' white box, a brief sojourn to the garage that briefly cleared the red mist in his head and across his eyes. Opening the box like a child overawed by the possible prize, he picked out a screwdriver, adjustable wrench, and a hammer (just in case, of course). The cardboard packaging was painful, but he was determined to breach its white metal exterior more easily.

Surprisingly, perhaps beguilingly, the bolts and screws on the back were released easily, all twelve of them, but he still needed to lever the metal skin off a bit. 'Fucking hell, shit wank!' he cursed, realising he had scratched some of the white enamel off, also leaving a bend in the right hand side from his desperate levering. But he was in, its inside all exposed and vulnerable.

He thought he needed to pull out a few parts to get nearer to the bottom, so with the haste of a proud man, but ultimately an idiot, he hadn't thought of at least ordering them on the floor so he could put them all back in the right order. Motherboards, wires, connectors and parts without a name surrounded the couple. A gibbering ape, and an inert, injured machine, both forlorn and pathetic.

A knock at the door. A concerned female face edged into the utility room. 'What's all the noise?' it uttered, 'did you read the fucking manual?' A sound started to erupt in his abdomen, he couldn't decide if it was a scream or hysterical laughter brewing, but those rats were readying themselves again. His partner plugged the power lead on the floor into the mains. The white box responded with a slight groan.