■ **JOHN C. DVORAK**

MY DINNER WITH IBM

John Dvorak's humiliating dinner with IBM representatives did nothing to lessen his dislike of the Micro Channel architecture . . . and of Big Blue itself.

IBM Corporation Headquarters—Armonk, New York. Offices around the world. Yearly sales: $56 billion. Profits: $5 billion. CEO: John Akers.

I didn't want to go to dinner with IBM. It meant killing a Saturday night, finding parking. It meant having to listen to an IBM spiel. *PC Magazine* contributing editor Winn Rosch called; he thought it might be fun. It turned out to be an incredible humiliation for everyone concerned.
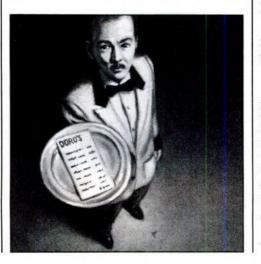
It started innocently enough. "Chet Heath wants to talk to you," said Rosch. "He thinks you're an enemy of the Micro Channel." Heath is the father of the Micro Channel. He was being carted around by Linda Dezan, an IBM PR person. Also in attendance was Elizabeth Knefel, whom Heath had invited along. Knefel is the producer of the "Computer Chronicles" TV show; she had already had a run-in with Dezan, who had canceled Heath's appearance on the show a few days before a scheduled shoot. Knefel badgered IBM corporate PR to get someone from IBM to represent the MCA on a show devoted to the subject. Someone relented and here they were in San Francisco.

The horrendous meal scene took place at Doro's in San Francisco, first-class but overpriced and old-fashioned. I sat next to Heath, who explained to me that the Micro Channel was designed for one primary reason—so that conservative buyers of IBM desktop machines would never have to set a switch on an add-in card.

"Most service calls are because some user has his switch settings wrong," said Heath. He alluded to the fact that clone buyers are generally a smarter class of people than the buyers of IBM stuff and that IBM buyers need all the help they can get. Hence the Micro Channel. This was the tone of the conversation. "It also saves money on printing documentation that tells people how to set the switches," Heath said as he cautioned me *not* to say that cheaper documentation was the motive for the MCA.

Heath's conversation drifted toward IBM boosterism and what a great company it is. "I don't understand why people portray IBM as malicious," he ranted. As he raved I soon sensed IBM's general contempt for its customers, the media, everyone. Its customers were dumb, the press was stupid, and the cloners were cheats.

The dinner began to wind down. Linda Dezan never said anything the entire meal. Just before the check arrived I asked Heath and Dezan for their business cards. Heath

couldn't find his and Dezan didn't bother to look for hers, saying she was "off duty." How professional, I thought.

When the bill arrived, it was shuttled to Linda Dezan, who looked at it and said she wasn't picking up the tab by herself (as is normally the case when a PR type invites people out). The waiter became impatient, as he assumed she was going to split the bill with Chet Heath. Wrong.

Dezan said, "We're not paying this. Get out your credit cards." Needless to say, the five guests of IBM were taken aback, especially Elizabeth Knefel, who hadn't even brought her wallet. Meanwhile, a group of waiters gathered, wondering what was going on. This attracted the attention of the other patrons, much to the embarrassment of everyone at the table (except for Dezan, who seemed to gloat). The waiters weren't about to divide a bill into seven parts. Not at a place like this. So I grabbed the check and said, "I'll pay it if IBM can't afford it."

Ms. Dezan said there must have been a misunderstanding. "Maybe I can take you to lunch someday."

"Yeah, McDonald's!" I retorted.

Apparently, Heath was also embarrassed by this scene, and I discovered that he somehow talked the staff into giving him the check after we left. The next day Dezan called my answering machine, apologized, and said *she* picked up the check. She left word that she'd call me the next day to apologize for the whole incident. Three weeks later—still no call.

Like I said: contempt for everyone. Tom Watson would be proud of this crew.