a rickety bridge of impossible crossing

my dream computer

22 Jan, 2023

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I was in an electronics store that doesn't exist anymore, like Radio Shack or Circuit City. I was just in there to look around, wasn't intending to buy anything, when one of the clerks approaches me and asks if they can help. As a joke, I asked if they had a Lappy 486, one of the computers Strong Bad used to check his emails in Homestar Runner.

"Finally, a computer for your lap!" Compy

The clerk smirked. "You're in luck, we still have one in stock." They unlocked a glass case behind the counter and pulled out a box. It was $450, which I could not afford, but I bought it because it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "This thing doesn't exist," I reassured myself, "Once I'm done messing with it I can probably sell it on ebay for twice that."

I got it home and started looking at the documentation. It was released as limited-edition H*R merch in 2011. It was an all-plastic beige box that was quite a bit chunkier than the Lappy from the cartoons, although it was much lighter than it looks, because it had modern-for-2011 components inside. It looked like one of the old Tandy laptops that are almost too big to actually use on one's lap:

Except instead of an LCD, it had an intense green LED display meant to evoke the green phosphor display of old monochrome CRTs. On the built-in screen you could play a number of Homestar Runner-themed text adventures, with crude but charming ASCII graphics and short PC speaker ditties.

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                Thy Dungeonman

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         Click to enter yon Dungeon
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If you flip the "TV" switch, to my astonishment, it used a
built-in RF modulator to broadcast a signal to your TV. No
wires needed, just turn your TV to channel 3 and the picture
would appear. I speculated that this is why the device was so
rare, the FCC surely wouldn't allow this sort of thing to be
sold. But I was sure that in present-day nobody would care
about the interference. In TV mode, the games had graphics but
they were still crude, on par with what you see in the Mario
Paint animations (youtube.com.) It had full MIDI sound and
occasional digitized speech samples.

Wondering what else I could do with the computer, I booted up a
thumb drive with a linux installer --- the only inputs or
outputs were a 3½" floppy drive and a USB port --- and got to
the step of the installer where it was preparing to partition
the hard drive. I realized with a sudden shock that I needed to
image the drive before I did *anything* else with the computer, I
might have the only one of these in existence, there were zero

references to the computer online, not even on the H*R wiki...
but I didn't have the tools I needed to image the drive and I
spent all my money on the computer. I was dismayed at the
thought that my only choice would be to sell the computer, and
I couldn't guarantee that whoever bought it would release the
contents of the drive. The world might never see the lost H*R
games that were on it. In despair, I woke up 🦝

#dream

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Built with Bear ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ   (hacked by raccoon)