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I had a dream about the Great Wall of China, as seen from space, which transmogrified after a few roof-reverberating snores into the Great Firewall of China, as seen from cyberspace. I woke up with my wife's pillow over my head and the urge to feature General Tso's chicken on my computer wallpaper—along with the germ of an idea. Since they haven't yet developed an effective antibiotic for the imagination (one might point to Hollywood's recent offerings in opposition to that assertion, but we'll carry on as though one had not), that germ quickly formed a slime-coated colony that took over an entire section of my brain the way the [insert your least-favorite major political party here] periodically take over Congress.

Moving cautiously but with all reasonable haste away from the politico-microbiological metaphor, I pondered over my first gallon of morning coffee what other Internet edifices could be said to be visible from cyberspace. First, though, I had to imagine something akin to the International (Cyber)Space Station drifting around on the Internet with little cybernauts peering out through the windows. They have tiny little cameras and even tinier little tubes of yogurt and I think I need another cup of coffee . . .

So, what else might said cybernauts spy as they endlessly circle the tube-within-a-tube (or whatever it was that silly politician said) that is the Internet? I came up with a few in the shower the next morning, although the scenario further degenerated from topological features to movies while I was shampooing my hair.

The Provider Backbone Bridge on the River Kwai: a group of captured network engineers is forced to build this structure that transports SONE-T-like connectivity along with carrier-grade packet-oriented traffic over the yawning chasm of Layer 2.

Router 66: Two geeks travel across America with a souped-up network analyzer looking for new protocols in the wild.

HUB: a network appliance breaks all the rules and goes renegade, assigning broadcast and collision domains at will just for kicks and hoarding all the bandwidth for itself. Eventually, the attached devices drop off, one by one, until only Hub is left with his little black book of MAC addresses, alone but still defiant.

I suppose that got a little silly; let's move on to more uplifting topics. My vote (the only one that counts, in this case) is for chatting about the place of Secure Engineering in the SDLC. First and most importantly, there is one. A place, I mean. Too many software developers seem to miss that simple notion. Not only is there a place, that place is most definitely not, as many more seem to think, in the "service pack two" stage. I feel an analogy coming on. I think it may even be a Grand Mal.

A popular, hip architect is hired to build a retail space. He decides, for ease of access and maximizing display effectiveness, to forgo any actual walls except for load-bearing beams. His design is met with overwhelming acclaim by the avant-garde architectural community. On opening day, customers flock to the store in droves, intrigued and exhilarated by the totally unfettered shopping experience. At first the concept seems brilliant, but then merchandise begins to disappear.

It's only a trickle at first . . . an item here and there. Not really noticed until the weekly inventory. Then the thefts escalate dramatically, until one morning the shelves are stripped bare. Nothing is left. Not a scrap. The architect is disheartened, as is, understandably, the store owner. They realize there must be something in place to prevent thievery, or at least make the thieves easier to detect and intercept. The architect hits upon the idea of trained geese.

The geese live two per cage, one cage per aisle, and sound the alarm if anyone comes into the store after closing hours. This works well for three nights. On the fourth morning the geese are gone and the butcher shop across the street coincidentally has a special on "pâté de foie gras, locally raised."

Undaunted, the architect next tries placing hidden tags on all the items in the store so that stolen merchandise can be more easily traced. This tactic is moderately successful until legitimate customers discover the tags and their function, at which point the goose poop hits the fan. Customers begin ripping their tags off and gluing them to the owner's car, house, clothing, and wife in protest. The store gets listed in a Web site for most egregious privacy offenders. Things are not going well for them, or for the architect.

In desperation, he hires armed guards with his own money to try to salvage the store. Sadly, the sight of them drives away customers in droves, until the business is no longer viable. The owner files for bankruptcy and the architect's career is badly stained by the whole sordid affair. He loses his license and is forced to move back in with his parents.

Some years later the now decaying premises, overrun with roaches, pigeons, and drug users, are bought by a young entrepreneur who immediately recognizes the enormous potential of the location. She painstakingly cleans and rebuilds, inside sturdy reinforced concrete walls with robust yet inconspicuous security measures included in the design from day one. She chooses well-constructed merchandise made with good quality materials, and offers it at reasonable prices. Her business is fabulously successful within mere weeks of opening, despite the walls. Customers do not seem to object to them at all, in fact, as they actually contribute additional space for displaying merchandise and allow the store to maintain a constant temperature as well as providing a safe, secure shopping environment. She eventually sells the store to a huge retail conglomerate and retires a multi-millionaire on her 42nd birthday.

Moral: Security belongs in the blueprints, not the remodeling plans.

Epilogue: I am proud to announce that after 40 years of avoiding it with one excuse or another, I have at long last taken the final step to full and unquestionable geekhood: HAM radio. You may now call me KF5SAR. General Class at present; hopefully by the time you read this, Amateur Extra.

QST, y'all.