

Author : Michial Hana

Illustrator : Sarah Wafeeq



A GAME OF MADNESS





We decided to play this crazy game on one of the boring summer evenings. We sat together, Ben, Dan, Richard and I, making the rules of the game that unfortunately, caused us all this sorrow that we can't overcome now. Yesterday, the police were in Ben's house. They investigated the fingerprints on the doors, windows, cups, plates and tables. They searched everywhere. They opened Ben's cupboard, searching for any evidence to help find him. They took his notebooks to read, for they might give them some clues of where he is. His mother and father were as worried as ever. They sent for us, his close friends, to go to the police station to testify with whatever information we have. My father is coming with me when he arrives. I am only thirteen. All what I hope for right now is that Ben didn't write anything in his notebook about the game we played and played until he was about to win.

No one knows where Ben disappeared. No one except Dan, Richard and I. Ben is trapped in the computer. If his dad turns the computer on he'll see him in the screen.

I guess I'll have to tell the story from the beginning.

It was the beginning of summer. We finally finished our exams and started planning our holidays. We put our school textbooks in the cupboards and we were finally allowed to do anything we want without any obligations. During the summer vacation, there are people who spend their time watching movies, and some spend their time playing football, while others collect stamps and put them in albums. My friends and I are different, we spend the day in front of the computer. Ben, especially Ben, was highly talented in using the computer. He was actually an expert. Whoever has problems while using the computer would usually come to Ben. During this summer, we decided to do something different. We decided we won't simply use the computer playing "Grand Theft Auto" and "Need for Speed" or "Chicken Feathers. Instead, we decided to make a common network.

An especially easy task given that we all live in the same building. Ben took care of this, since he's the most experienced in using computers.

He bought some cables that go out from his window to each one of us. Each cable has a rectangular edge that connects to a place on the new card. Then he installed a network program on the computers and that's how we got an internal network between our computers. Now, each one of us can view all the programs and files on the other computers, too. The network also enabled us to chat together all the time, either by writing or by microphone, without needing to connect to the internet. We became stuck to our computers. It's great to use technology when it's used properly.

We spent a few days exploring what each of us has on his computer from songs, programs and movies. It was easy.

Before we used the flash memory every time we wanted to copy anything from one computer to another, then we installed it into our computer and so on. Now, life is easier.

We don't even need to transfer the files, as we can view them on our computers and use them through the network if my friend's computer is turned on. We can also play the games on the computer against one another.

We participated in some car races through the internal network. It was great fun. We didn't even need to leave the house.

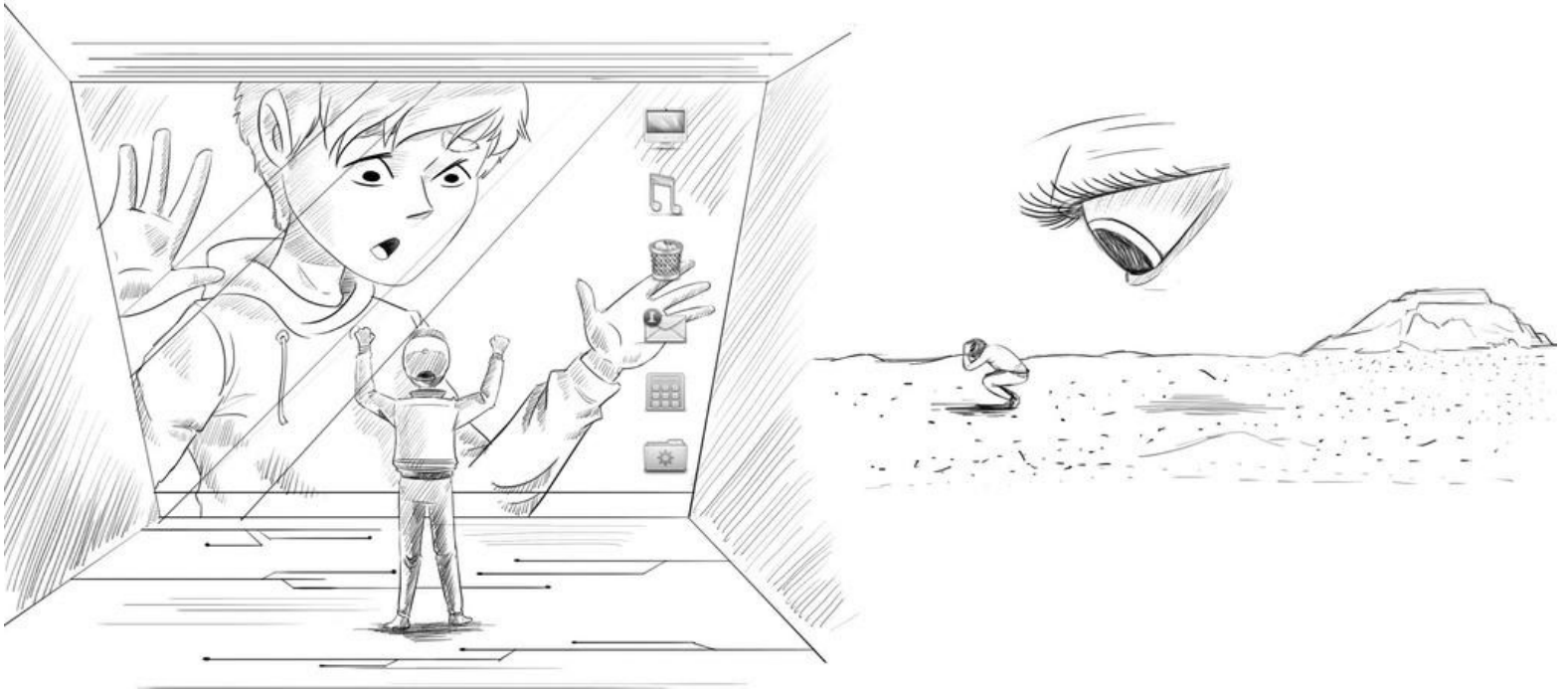
After a few days, it wasn't fun anymore.

It became ordinary or rather boring.

So, we started to look for something new to do.

We arranged a meeting on one of the chatting programs, and each of us started writing their suggestions for what to do in the conversation. There were many suggestions, but we all agreed on Ben's suggestion. He said we'll play a game. Whoever can bring the strangest things to the network within twenty-four hours, will win a new hard disk that we'll all contribute in buying. Everyone was happy with his suggestion. We stopped the internal network temporarily, so we wouldn't cheat, and it was automatically programmed to come back at eight o'clock pm. I was so excited and surfed the internet immediately to find something I can fascinate them by. I browsed a few websites and spent around three hours without finding anything until after midnight. Then, I had to turn off my computer, so my father wouldn't get angry.

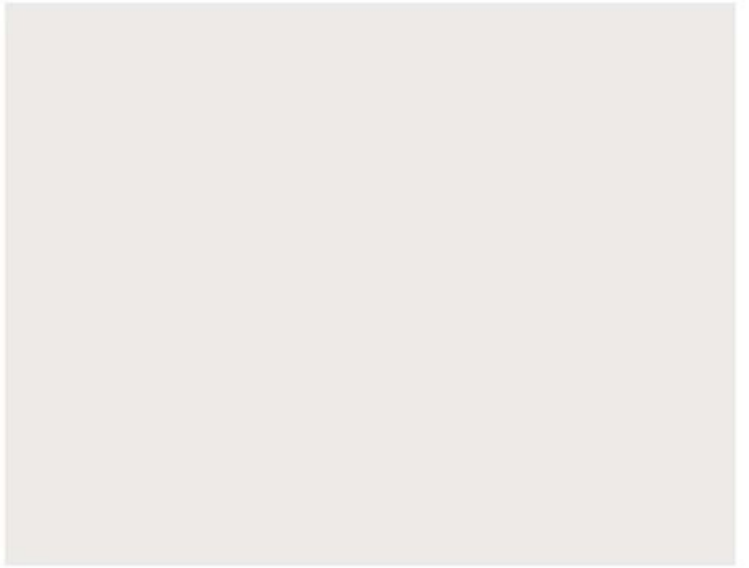
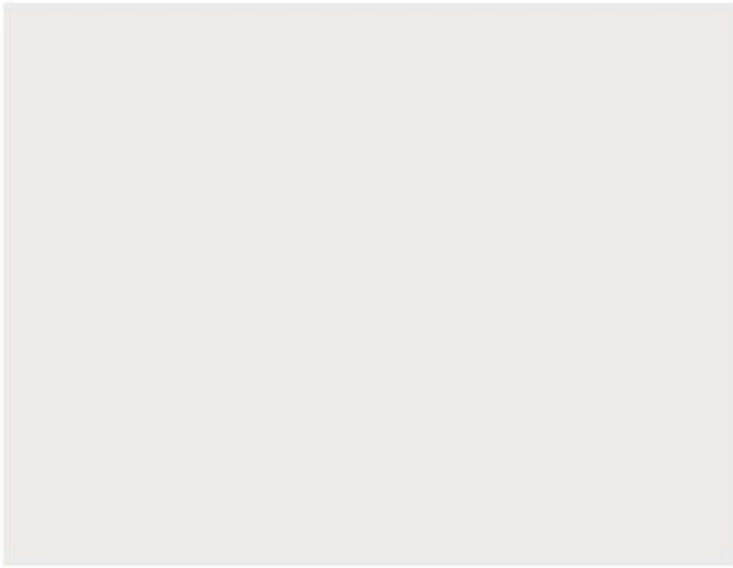
I woke up late on the next day.



I connected to the internet straight away and started searching again, but didn't find anything. So, I searched again, but still I didn't find what I wanted, but I saved a weird picture that shows a big eye observing a small man in the desert. I was sure I wouldn't win in the game. Certainly, there are much more interesting things on the internet.

At eight o'clock the internal network started working again as Ben scheduled. I don't know how he does this, but he is great at it.

The first thing I saw on the screen was a strange picture of Ben while he sat on the screen and tapped on it from inside. "What a weird joke," I thought. "Maybe this is how he wants to astonish us."



.” I tried to overlook this picture and run the chatting program on the computer, but it wouldn’t working. The only thing that appeared was this strange image. Ben’s face was terrified. After a while, an electronic message appeared on the screen.

First, I thought it was a joke and I didn’t like it at all. I restarted the computer but Ben’s image appeared again. He was still tapping the screen in a very strange way. I began thinking about it, but another message appeared.

From: Ben@gmail.com

To: Henry@yahoo.com, Dan@hotmail.com,
Richard@maktoob.com

Sent: Wednesday, January 22 - 08 - 2018 7

Subject: Help!

I think there’s nothing more exciting than what you can see now. I am here inside the computer now. I don’t know how I got here, I didn’t mean it. It’s very narrow in here, and I’m terrified here.

Please help!

From: Ben@gmail.com

To: Henry@yahoo.com, Dan@hotmail.com,
Richard@maktoob.com

Sent: Wednesday, January 22 - 08 - 2018 7

Subject: How it all started.

It seems that you can’t believe that this is really happening.



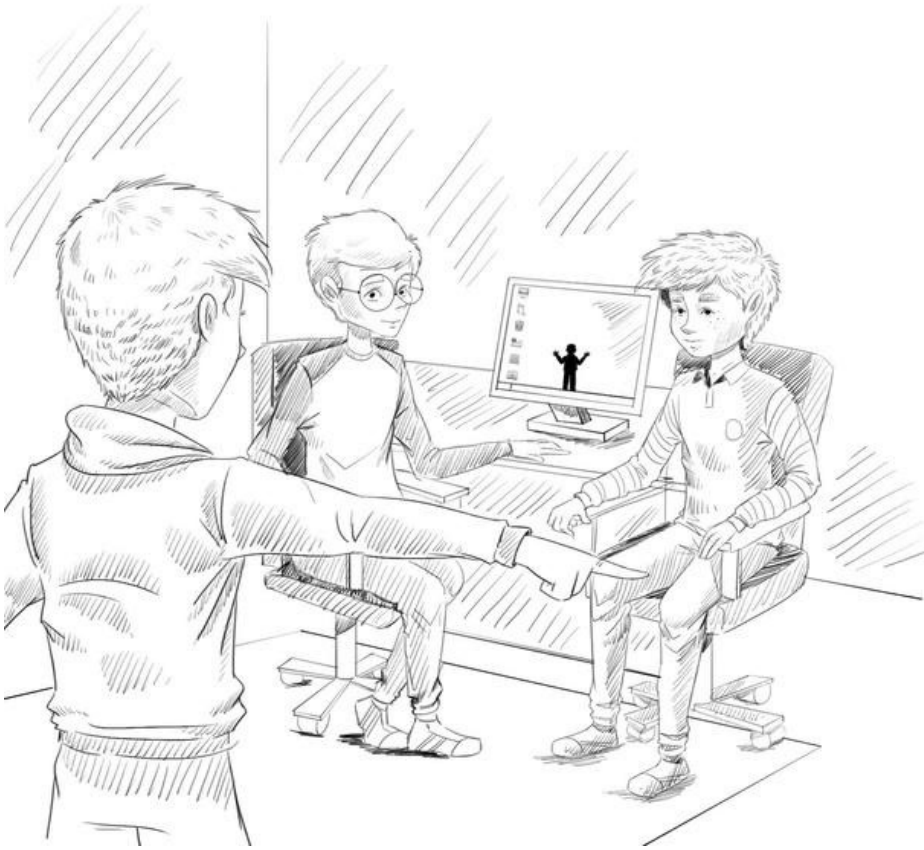
I'll tell you how it all started.

As you know I have great experience is using electronics. It's my hobby from long ago. But nothing has ever happened to me as bad as what has happened now.

I linked a frequency condenser from an old recorder with the scanner, then I increased the electric current to the scanner through a machine I found in my father's toolkit. Then I sat on the glass of the scanner and I turned it on. I thought the scanner will scan a detailed picture of the trousers, but unfortunately it transferred me into the computer.

It's cold and dark in here and its very tight. Please get me out of here as soon as you can. Are you still sitting in front of the screen! Do something!

After I read the message, the screen switched to the image of Ben once more. He was knocking in the screen again. Oh, my goodness! Could this be true? I couldn't shut down the computer from the start menu anymore. The image was still on the screen, so I unplugged the computer. If he was truly there, in his own computer and this image is being transferred by the network, then there is no problem to unplug the computer.



I tried calling Richard, but his phone was busy.

I tried with Dan, but his phone was busy too. I unplugged the internal network cable to try to control the computer, then I restarted it but it was still again. So, I decided to go to Richard and Dan to see what we can do about it. Dan's mother opened the door. I went to his room and I found out that Richard was there, too. It seems that they already knew about Ben.

Dan's computer was turned on and online. Ben's image was still there. Richard thought there's must be a trick and that he might be sending these messages to make us believe the trick.

Suddenly I yelled, and felt that we were fools.

"Why don't we go up to his apartment, to see what's up. He couldn't have left his apartment, too."



We went up to the fifth floor where Ben lives. We knocked the door and his mother opened the door. She was astonished to see us, because she knew we get in touch via the computer and we don't need to meet. She came to his room with us, but we didn't find him. The computer was opened in standby mode, and next to it there was a cold cup of tea. Ben's slippers were under the scanner table. His mother wondered, "where did he go?" she searched for him all around the apartment, but she didn't find him. She woke up his father and looked for him together, and we left them in astonishment. What happened the next morning was strange. The police were there investigating the fingerprints in the flat. His parents called the police to investigate. We were the only ones who knew the secret, but we wouldn't dare say it. They would think we were insane and no one will believe us. They'll say it's our imagination. So, we decided to do something else about it.

We have to do something for him. We all gathered in my room. I reconnected the network and the turned the computer on. Ben's image appeared again. We didn't know what we could do.

We didn't know what to do to help Ben. He was trapped in the computer. I guess it's the first time in history that something like this has ever happened.

We all sat in front of the computer in my room; Dan, Richard and me. Ben's image still tapped on the screen. When I looked carefully, there was something wrong about the picture. Did Ben animate this picture to grab our attention?

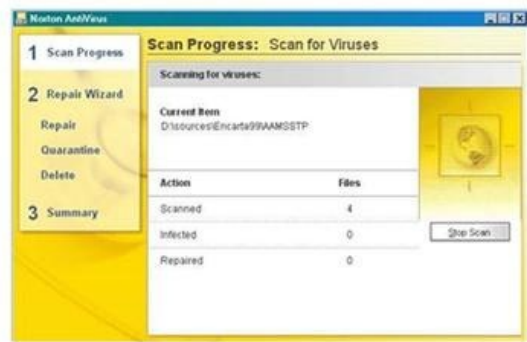
Suddenly the picture disappeared and the computer became normal. We wanted to speak to Ben, but we didn't know how. Shall we send him an email? But how will he know that we sent him a message and how will he reply?

Dan suggested that we should use the search function to find him through the internet by writing his name in the search box. He suggested that if Ben was in the computer he has to have magnetic presence on the hard disk.

He must be like one of the files on the system. We liked his suggestion. It was the first thing that made sense that was said in our meeting. So, Dan wrote "Ben" in the search box. He made sure that the search covered the whole network, including Ben's computer, then he clicked "enter."

The computer searched for a few minutes. The red lights were continuously flashing to indicate that the search is still going on. The hard disk memory on our computers is fairly large and that's why it was as if we were searching for a needle in a stack of hay. It reminded me of the picture I saved of a big eye looking to a very small man. We were doing the same. Unfortunately, the search ended with no results. All what we found was a few movies for the popular movie star, Ben Stiller.

Where could've Ben have gone? Is he still alive? We were desperate to find him.



Then Dan noticed something. He said “we searched for Ben’s name, this does not necessarily mean that the scanner named him Ben. Most probably it gave him one of these names given to documents. It may be difficult to guess the name. Another possibility is that Ben himself might have given it a name that’s difficult to guess.”

Then another idea came to Dan, “Why don’t we scan the files using an anti-virus. It can sure show all the files with strange names and the human file on the disk.”

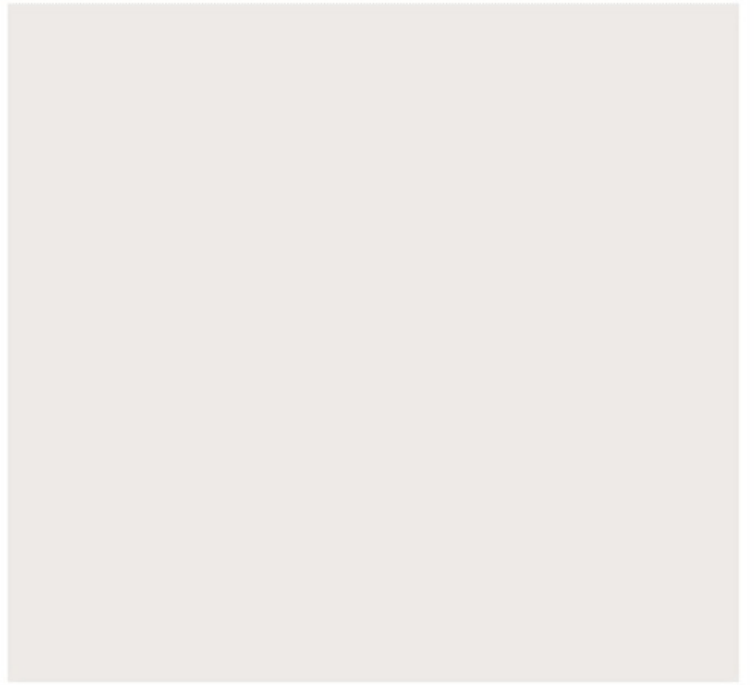
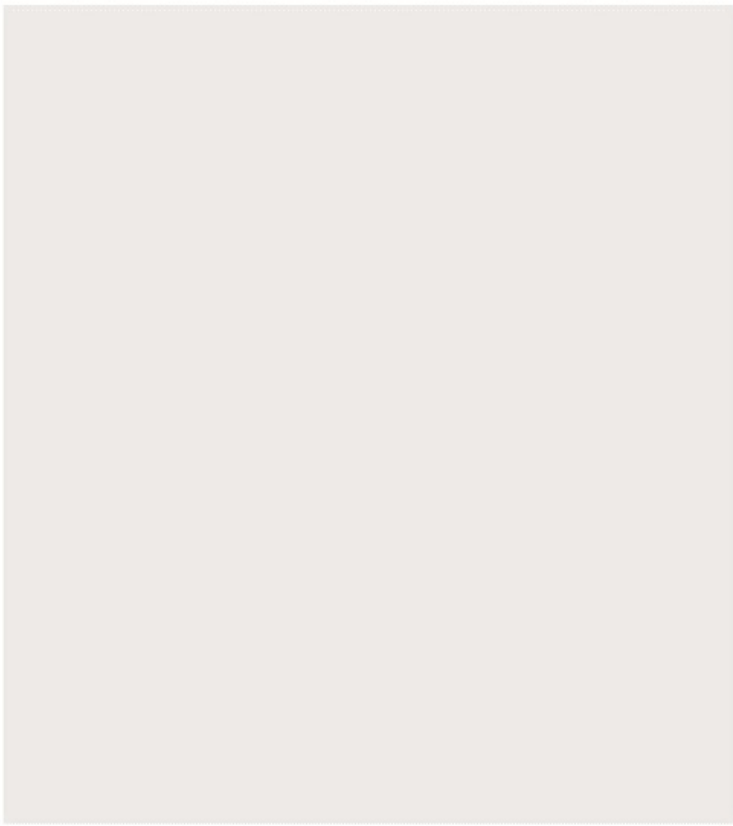
Dan ran the anti-virus.

After a while, he noticed an isolated file on the anti- virus. It seemed like the isolated rooms in hospitals. Anti-viruses usually quarantine any suspected files, so they won’t move the virus to other parts of the computer.

I looked at the quarantined file. It was under the name “ 001 ” and its extension was strange, not like the other computer extensions. Oh! and it was incredibly huge, around ten gigabytes.

The scanner turned Ben into a computer file.

When the anti-virus noticed its activity, it isolated him. Dan removed Ben’s file from isolation and stopped the anti-virus, so it won’t isolate Ben once again. Most probably, Ben could be active again in no time.



And it happened! After a very short while, we received another email.

I'm not sure what will happen to me if someone decides to turn it off.

That's why I have to move to one of your computers. I tried to do this before, but your hard disks are full. When I tried to delete some files on Henry's computer, the anti-virus isolated me.

I hope Henry can find me some extra space, before someone shuts down the computer.

I'll be waiting.

From: Ben@gmail.com

To: Henry@yahoo.com, Dan@hotmail.com,

Richard@maktoob.com

Sent: Wednesday, January 22 - 08 - 2018 7

Subject: Thanks!

This is the first time you ever do something smart, guys! I thought I'll never get out of there again and by the way I'm not enjoying myself as a computer file at all.

What terrifies me most is if anyone decides to turn off my computer at home. Fortunately, it's still turned on, but I don't think that this will go on for long.

We were very happy with this message. This means Ben is fine. I started emptying some space on my computer to make space for him to move to my computer. After a while, the red lights flashed, which meant that the hard disk was working. Ben must have moved to my computer. I just can't believe that my friend turned to a file in the hard disk of my computer. My mind finds it so difficult to comprehend the idea, but then again, it's the only truth for now, and the truth is; we need a solution for this situation.

We discussed what we should do. We must understand first how Ben got into the computer to know how to get him out. While we discussed the issue, we found one of the movies that was turned on by itself, and we later understood that Ben turned it on. He must be enjoying watching the movie from such a close distance, it's as if he's part of the movie himself.

I moved the cursor and turned the movie off. This is not the right time to watch movies.

Ben is our best in using the computer. He must help us to get him out but how can he share his opinions with us?

Dan suggested we can open our notes and write on them. He'll see what we write and then Ben can write back, and he was right.

- Ben. Ben can you see what we write?

- I'm here.

- Are you ok?

- Better than you are.

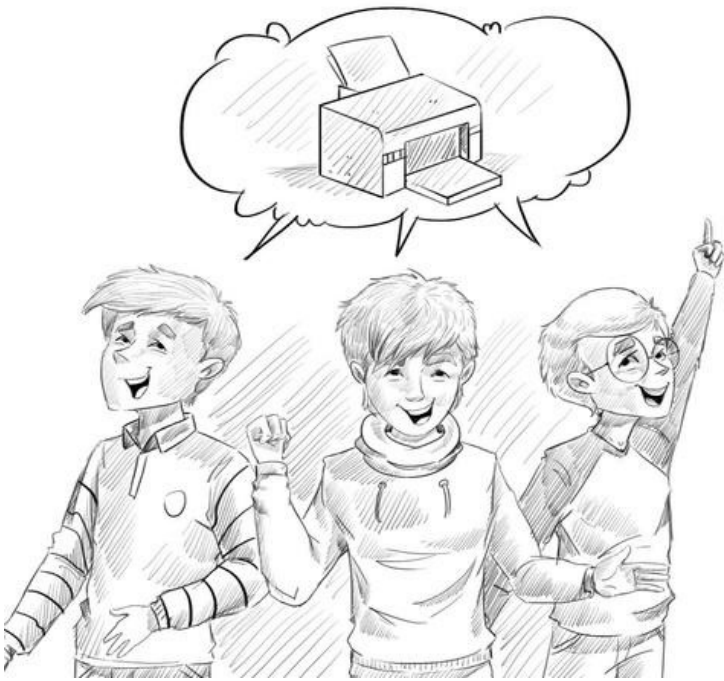
- You're rude as usual.

- Haven't you done anything till now?

- We don't know what to do, any suggestions?

- Can't I ever rely on you?

- We don't know yet what happened to you. How did the scanner get you in the computer?



- Ok, when we deal with the computer, we need something called appendix. The appendixes we communicate with the computer with are called input. These are like the keyboard, mouse and scanner.

When the computer communicates with us, it needs another appendix called the output. That's the screen, headphones and printer. All what the scanner did was its job. He entered an electronic copy from the documents you put on and turned it to files it can read.

I entered through one of the inputs of the computer but how will I ever get out?

- Of course, through one of the outputs.

- Which one do you suggest?

- The printer of course.

Ben is such a genius. I always liked the logic in his thought.

All that we must do is add electric condensers to the printer in the same way they were added to the scanner. Then we have to print the file that contains Ben.



Dan and I went to Ben's apartment and knocked on the door. His poor mother opened. We said 'hello' and entered immediately to Ben's room. We took the scanner with all its cables. We went out in front of her. She gazed at us, and yelled, to ask us what are we up to? We replied, "we have no time to explain."

We got the scanner into the room, we studied how to add the condenser and added it to the printer in the same way Ben explained.

Now the printer was ready to print the file Ben. The printer started printing, then it started making a very strange noise that became louder and louder. We all went away from the printer when we saw smoke coming out of it.



Suddenly it broke out with a terrifying sound. We saw Ben standing on the table, among the smoke. It was unbelievable. He was like a genie coming out of the lantern. We celebrated his return, while the door knocked heavily.

Ben's mother was knocking. She was suspicious of us when we took the scanner in such a strange way. We thought she'd be happy to see Ben, but she pulled him by the ear, because she thought he was hiding with us.

Do you think it's wise to tell his parents the truth? Could anyone believe that Ben entered the computer then came out again? Won't they accuse us of insanity?

It's finally over. In any case, I'll ask Ben to pay for the broken printer.



THE END