

Slack Space

Sculpting the computer monsters — virus inspiration

Sarah Hilley

How does an artist portray the torture inflicted by bugs and viruses on IT security managers? While exploring the desolate interior of Iceland last summer, I came across the work of Icelandic artist, Jón Adólf Steinólfsson.

The artist's imaginative wood sculptures of a computer virus and bug reminded me of the countless devilish forms of trolls and elves, which appear to be etched into the lava rock formations throughout Iceland's stark landscape. Heaps of crouching, bulbous rocks hunch across the landscape like fearsome grotesque fiends from the underworld. In the desolation of the empty Icelandic interior, such rock formations appear to come alive. In the nothingness, the vulgar rock expressions seem animated. Steinólfsson's depiction of computer malware conjures up ideas of such mythical Norse ogres living deep within the rocky core of mountains.

His representation of a malignant virus (see [picture 1](#), below) looks like a wicked elf that is peeping out from such an underworld. The eyes of the virus glint with a knowing gleam of chaotic intent. The creature looks like it is bursting to escape from the system and spread its venomous viral genes. It is imploding into the shape of the laptop screen, suggesting that the whole system can be manipulated to suit its whims.



Picture 1



Picture 2

The artist's portrayal of a bug (see [picture 2](#), above) shows a troll-like rascal cheekily pressing a keyboard button. The naughty imp is creating havoc by dictating functions that should be rightly commanded by the user. The bug is then goading the computer user by giving the thumbs up. This could be a metaphor for software behaving badly, due to bugs. The laptop screen is also cracking illustrating weaknesses in the program. However, the bug sculpture appears less vindictive than the virus — more playful, but disobedient. Indeed, the character appears lazy and indolent. This expression could represent the negligence that allows flaws to arise in software in the first place.

Jón Adólf Steinólfsson is a wood sculptor from Iceland. After having studied, both in Iceland and Austria, he practiced his art in England for several years. Steinólfsson carves in bone and most kinds of wood, though the Icelandic birch remains his favourite material. His work is inspired by Nordic mythology as well as everyday life.

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