

Being lucky is observing what you weren't expecting: An illustration

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I decided to begin searching for a replacement for my current laptop computer since it was by this point literally being held together with electrical tape, and I decided to go against my more common computer replacement policy of “Wait until it breaks, and then panic.”

There was one model I had my eye on, and it was on sale at a local big-box store as one of those doorbuster deals. I didn't feel like waking up at 4am to stand in line for the slim chance of actually snagging one, so I figured I would just wait, and maybe it'll go on sale again after the shopping season. (This is a strategy that isn't available when you use the “Wait until it breaks, and then panic” model.)

A few weeks later, I happened to be in the shop for an unrelated reason. I naturally stopped by the laptop computer section and, as expected, the model I had in mind was no longer on display. It had presumably sold out. On the other hand, on my way out the store, I saw that very model sitting in the locked cage at the front of the store. The locked cage is one of those loss-prevention techniques, where high-value items are not kept on the shelves. Instead, only a token (such as claim ticket or an empty box) is placed on the shelf, and you bring the token to the customer service desk to exchange it for the actual item.

If the laptop had sold out, why did they have one in the cage? I asked an employee, who explained, “Oh, yeah, we sold out of these almost immediately, but a few days later, somebody returned one unopened, so that's why we still have one unit up here.”

Is it still for sale?

“Sure is.”

Not only was it still for sale, it was still for sale at the same price. There was a bit of confusion that followed, since they had to figure out how to sell an item that was not on the shelves and for which there was no token, but everything got straightened out, and I walked out with my new laptop.

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