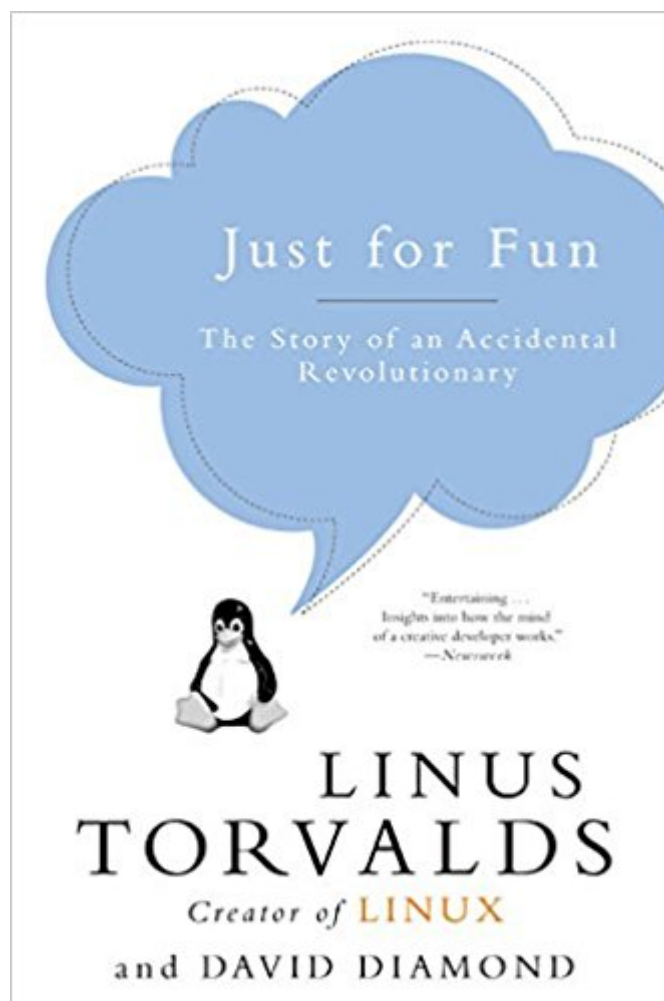


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Just For Fun: The Story Of An Accidental Revolutionary



Synopsis

Once upon a time Linus Torvalds was a skinny unknown, just another nerdy Helsinki techie who had been fooling around with computers since childhood. Then he wrote a groundbreaking operating system and distributed it via the Internet -- for free. Today Torvalds is an international folk hero. And his creation LINUX is used by over 12 million people as well as by companies such as IBM. Now, in a narrative that zips along with the speed of e-mail, Torvalds gives a history of his renegade software while candidly revealing the quirky mind of a genius. The result is an engrossing portrayal of a man with a revolutionary vision, who challenges our values and may change our world.

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Customer Reviews

Most 31-year olds can't boast of being the instigator of a revolution. But then again, the world's leading promoter of open source software and creator of the operating system Linux does humbly call himself an accidental revolutionary--accidental being the operative word here. Just for Fun is the quirky story of how Linus Torvalds went from being a penniless, introverted code writer in Helsinki in the early 1990s to being the unwitting (and rather less than penniless) leader of a radical shift in computer programming by the end of the decade. OK, perhaps "story" in the traditional sense of the term is stretching it a bit. This whole book is more like a series of e-mails, an exercise in textual communication for someone more used to code language than conversation: choppy sentences packed into short paragraphs, and sometimes just one-liners. The pace is fast, but the quippy tone

can get somewhat tiring, though it definitely suits the portrayal of a computer-dominated life. And like an e-mail conversation, the tense often changes, the topics jump back and forth, and the narrators occasionally change, mostly alternating between the Linux man himself and Red Herring executive editor David Diamond, who convinced the difficult-to-pin-down Torvalds to write his story (or at least allow Diamond to poke, prod, and pull it out of him, all the while giving his own impressions and interpretations). But Torvald's tale contains enough informative and entertaining tidbits--on growing up in dark, strangely silent but communication-gadget-obsessed Finland (which boasts more cell phones per capita than anywhere else), on what makes passionate code writers tick, on making the transition from unknown computer geek to world-famous computer geek, on the convergence of technology and ideology, on his work for Transmeta and involvement (or lack thereof) with all the players worth mentioning in Silicon Valley - to keep more than just computer programmers engrossed in his story. For the latter, of course, Just for Fun will be required reading. If you pick up this book as a geek's guide to the meaning of life (which, believe it or not, Torvalds does ramble on about at the beginning and the end), then you're in for a bit of a shallow take on the whole thing. But if you're interested in the idea of technological development as a global team sport, and how a nerdy Finnish transplant to California got the whole game going in the first place, check out Linus's story... just for fun, of course. --S. Ketchum --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The autobiography of a career computer programmer, even an unorthodox one, may sound less than enthralling, but this breezy account of the life of Linux inventor Torvalds not only lives up to its insouciant title, it provides an incisive look into the still-raging debate over open source code. In his own words (interspersed with co-writer Diamond's tongue-in-cheek accounts of his interviews with the absentminded Torvalds), the programmer relates how it all started in 1981 with his grandfather back in Finland, who let him play around on a Vic 20 computer. At 11 years old, Torvalds was hooked on computers especially on figuring out how they ran and on improving their operating systems. For years, Torvalds did little but program, upgrading his hardware every couple of years, attending school in a desultory fashion and generally letting the outside world float by unnoticed, until he eventually wrote his own operating system, Linux. In a radical move, he began sharing the code with fellow OS enthusiasts over the burgeoning Internet in the early 1990s, allowing others to contribute to and improve it, while he oversaw the process. Even though Torvalds is now a bigger star in the computer world than Bill Gates, and companies like IBM are running Linux on their servers, he has retained his innocence: the book is full of statements like "Open source makes

sense" and "Greed is never good" that seem sincere. Leavened with an appealing, self-deprecating sense of humor and a generous perspective that few hardcore coders have, this is a refreshing read for geeks and the techno-obsessed. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Linus Torvalds book is great reading with honest candor. The Inventor, Founder, Maintainer, Giver of the Linux operating system kernel speaks of the motivations, reasons, and how he recoded a 1970s Bell Laboratories "UNIX code" to become something the mainstream computer Users can run on their personal computers. This is the story of a person seeing a problem and solving it with economy. He realized that not every person can afford the software upkeep to slow the degradation of computer hardware investment. (Our family Apple IIe system with all the "trimmings" cost over US\$2,683 in 1984.) From one person comes Linux giving it to all in the world. And Linux is the reason we now have cheap Android phones, new toys, and new technologies made affordable today. Today there is no Apple Computers support for Apple IIe hardware. Then there is NTS's Operators Supervisor computer system with the ancient Intel 8086 inside the IBM's PS/2 system and that has no IBM support. Along comes Linux, presently Linux has run on Intel processors as far back as the 80386, 80486, 80501, 80552, as far back as AMD K5, K6-II, K6-III, as far back as Cyrix C3 (ancient processors, but they still have their uses). Linux runs all many calculators, some deep space telescope clockdrives, Tunneling LASERs for the Electronic Microscopes, MRI diagnostic machines at hospitals, etc. Yes, Linus Torvalds spent eight years of his life re-coding the UNIX operating system and then giving it to this world so that that "User" average can have his cake and eat it. All this without cost to the User. With the popularity of Linux increasing (today there are over 37,840+ distributions, variants, editions, and versions of Linux, many are still classified) its reach widens every year, from controlling toys, communication devices, plastic surgery, drones, hyper-technologies, quantum relativity research, IBM's Quantum processors, Honda's on board automotive GPS, many automobiles, trucks, RVs, snowmobile, sea cycles, electric motorcycles, etc are running some form of Linux. Almost everything can run on Linux operating systems because many mainstream distributions require a lot less computer hardware resources than UNIX, Windows, or Mac OS-X operating systems. Matter of reality, some of the smallest complete distributions of Linux operating systems are only 13 KiloByte, 3 MegaByte, 10 MegaByte, 14 MegaByte in size and never requires any storage device making for extremely "hack proof" computer systems and networks. There are at least one distribution of Linux for almost every computer processor ever manufactured. This means cellular, satellite, and even HAM radio

transceivers. Linux operating systems run on 98% of this world's super computers. Linux operating systems run on 100% of the world's Quantum Processors. Linux run on 100% of the world's faster than light computers because its the simplest and most reliable. Have a project that requires a Main Frame or Super Uber Computer System? Linux can "Cluster" together millions of plain old even obsolete computer systems to calculate and solve a problem like a gigantic main frame (abeit slower of course, but very affordable with old computers). Some versions of Linux operating systems can controller 8,192 processors simultaneously without a hiccup. Enough of this, up to the Reader to learn the rest. With quantum processors on the way soon, data processing will be at the speed of light at last. Though the operating systems must keep up with the security and monitoring and here Linux shines. The coding is compact, fast, compatible, reliable, most importantly accessible. UNIX, Windows, and Mac OS-X are not end User accessible-- they will sue the User for modifying their code. Linux does not require a storage device... hint, in A.D.1960 there were no floppy discs, no magnetic hard disks, and no FlashROM memory. Less hardware, less traffic, more speed. User can install Linux just into the main logic board's main memory run Linux and all software in real time without extra delays. As Technical Support folks, we are not prejudice about what operating systems to use to help our customers. All operating systems have their strengths and weaknesses, but Linux is that much stronger and versatile because the Creator made certain it is the better and progressing to become the best end User computer operating system ever to come from a single human mind!

Linus tells his story from the heart. From being a college student living at home spending inordinate amount of time staring into a computer screen (and little time doing much else - your stereotypical computer geek if you will) to being a minor celebrity in 2001 when this book was published, Linus tells his story in his own words. He includes the emotions, personal anecdotes, and enough family/childhood background to understand his motivations. Do his opinions on the meaning of life, celebrity, or even semi-technical issues like the underpinnings of Mac OS X matter that much to the average reader? Probably not. They probably only matter to his most die hard fans, which seems ostensibly whom this book is aimed at. Yet, at the same time, they make for interesting reading since his famously brutal honesty is on full display throughout the book. I would in fact expand the audience a little bit further to include most technical people involved with the software world - frankly a significant portion of the book could be boring/incomprehensible to those with no background in software. Just for Fun also includes an interesting dual narrative, featuring the ghost writer (David Diamond) taking on full first person voice for some chapters (clearly indicated in italics). At first

these interludes may seem jarring, but overtime they reveal more about Linus's character and story than we would get from the "Linus chapters" alone. Neither the chapters by Linus nor the chapters by Diamond are particularly well written, but they're also not unnecessarily long, flowery, or philosophical. Linus writes in Just for Fun as he does on the kernel mailing list - direct and to the point. In short, Just for Fun tells the inspiring story of how a single passionate software developer can change the world and have fun doing it. It's your classic underdog story. It's good reading for software developers everywhere, especially those with some sense of computer history and an interest in operating systems.

A must-read bio of both Linus & Linux. Hilarious, irreverent, but above all, ultimately funny account of what it meant to be an accidental revolutionary by creating Linux. Only reason not to give full rating, are three typos/erratas that I've found, and considering that to be the editor's task, I know they could do better. But as for the story itself, I really enjoyed it :-)

This is a very funny and informative book. Much of the material has to deal with technical issues, such as Linus describing how he implemented multiprocessing on his Sinclair desktop computer, so this is not a book that caters heavily towards those with no experience in computer programming. However, it does give a relatively non-technical summary of Linus's life from childhood to adulthood, it contains a number of jokes that most non-computing people can understand, and it also discusses Linus' philosophy on life and ethical issues in technology, so even those who have never written computer code can identify with significant portions of this book.

This book was a mixed bag. The content itself was somewhat interesting, offering insight into Linus' views and past. However, only 20% of the book (at most) was written by him; the rest was written by his co-author. This becomes clear when, despite being written from his perspective, there are obvious typos such as referring to the ls command as "l's". It is also obvious that the book was never proof read, given obvious spelling mistakes, mismatched brackets and the like. In short, the quality was what I would expect from a blog post, not a published book.

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