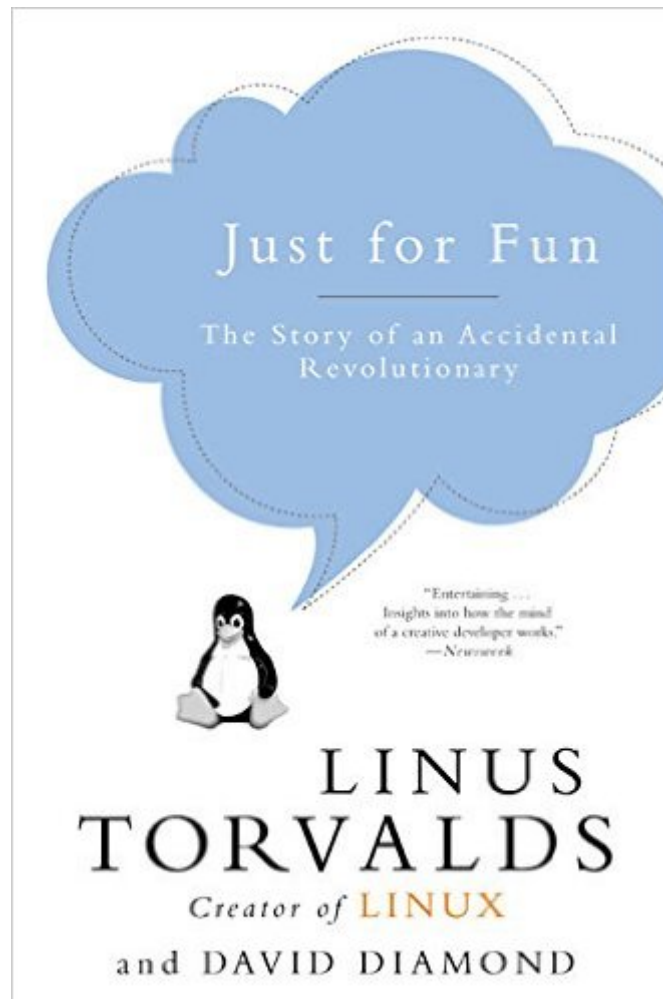


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Just For Fun: The Story Of An Accidental Revolutionary



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

Just For Fun isn't about to win any writing awards (boy, I really hope I don't have to eat crow for saying that), but it provides a quick, enjoyable story. The book is a conversational look at the creation of Linux and Linus' life. It begins with the origins of Linux and plenty of dwelling on Linus' lack of a social life (too much, actually). From there, Linus chronicles the surge in the popularity of Linux and the changes it caused in his life. Nothing particularly "revolutionary" is covered, but it is an interesting story nonetheless. Linus comes across just as you would expect, somewhat arrogant and very direct. He says exactly what is on his mind and doesn't make any excuses. Yep, Linus is the same person he has been since the beginning. :) On the downside, the book has several chapters of commentary by David Diamond that essentially document the "making of" this book. They are

probably there to add some color, but I don't think they add anything.

Linus Torvalds, as most geeks and many non-geeks know, is the person behind Linux, the operating system. This book provides a soap box for Linus to talk about what has driven him (computers, programming) towards his goal. He did not intend to create a phenomenal operating system; rather, he was content adding features to his terminal emulator until the fine day that it started to grow into an operating system. In the early '90's I remember reading a posting from him on the MINIX bulletin board; the posting urged readers to download and install Linux, his new operating system based on Unix (I never quite got down to doing that, but I did follow his work including his visit to Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, where I worked during the early-mid 90's.) The book is an interesting read for me since I readily subscribe to the open/free software, extreme programming, open source movement. Reading about Linus' travails with Andrew Tannenbaum (an extremely well known Computer Science personality) and their exchange on the merits of micro-kernel vs. macro-kernel architectures is very interesting. I am not sure non-computer literate folks (non-geeks) would find this as interesting. What they will find interesting is Linus' philosophy that the world constantly moves towards entertainment with a short detour through survival and forming of societies. Case in point: industrial revolution started as a means for humans to survive in a dangerous planet, evolved into humans forming societies to channel it and has now morphed into a quest for entertainment. Computers are no different -- started off as few people depending on them for their survival (the 'anointed ones' behind glass windows), evolved into the formation of societies (bulletin boards, newsgroups, chat rooms) and are now used for entertainment. Maybe he has something there.

I really wanted to hear Linus' story, in his own words. Unfortunately, this book showed very little organization aside from chronological; there was no underlying *story* there. Just a bunch of disjointed facts presented in chronological order. The personal anecdotes, while interesting, shed very little insight about Linux. I was hoping to get some real insight into Linus the person and how he is reflected in Linux the operating system. To this end, the book failed to deliver. However, I was interested enough in his story to slog through the awful writing in this book. Large sections of text (pages on end) are presented in italics, which make it extremely difficult to read. I don't blame Linus for this abomination of a book: that blame clearly lies with David Diamond since that was *his job*. For folks who really want to read a good book about Linus the person and Linux the operating system, make sure that you read Rebel Code by Glyn Moody. That is a well-written book and

thoroughly researched book that places Linux within the context of the open-source movement.

This book is in fact the "bio" of Linus Torvalds, the creator of Linux, an operating system (OS) that has been described as an "alternative" to Windows for PC users. In it, Linus describes his early years, how he mostly loved to play with computers, spending hours and hours on an old Commodore, and then a Sinclair PC, and so forth. After saving up to buy a better PC, he describes how he tried to install Minix, a form of the Unix OS on his machine and ran into so many frustrations he decided to create his own OS, which eventually became Linux. He describes that process, as well as his "flame war" over the Internet that he encountered with Andrew Tannenbaum, the Minix creator. Another thing I noticed from this book is how Linus doesn't look at himself as any kind of "hero" or "amazing person" just because he created something so many computer folk use as their OS of choice. Essentially, Linus comes off for the most part as just another average guy, even if this "average guy" created something quite amazing and became the most famous example of "Open Source software." Interesting story from the "Linux creator" himself, as to how Linux first came to be and what it is today, as well as about the man himself.

This book is great if you have some knowledge of Linux and the open source community. The best part is towards the end when you get Linus's moderate opinions of a variety of topics. I just started using Linux in the past few years and I always thought that Linus shared the same views as Richard Stallman. This is not the case at all, it turns out Linus has really practical views when it comes to open source software and IP in general. The first 1/2 of the book is a brief history of Linux. This book is a really quick read. It turned out to be much more entertaining than I originally thought it would be.

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