From Basics to Bytecode: A Guide to Computers and Programming

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Introduction

This book is an experiment. It is an exploratory book, designed to guide readers from already acquired fundamentals of programming to complex real-world applications, with an emphasis on learning by doing. It builds upward from basic concepts, encouraging readers to engage deeply with both small-scale and large-scale programming environments. And it assumes using Large Language Models (LLMs), which assist you with feedback, code suggestions, and deeper understanding.

Part 1: Foundations of Programming. We begin with an introduction to fundamental programming concepts, including variables, control structures, and functions. Along the way, we'll explore these topics in greater depth and cover related foundational concepts. To enhance your understanding, you'll be encouraged to use LLMs alongside your learning process. These tools will offer immediate feedback, code suggestions, and explanations, helping you grasp the material more effectively.

Part 2: Understanding Virtual Machines. Transition from basic programming into the concept of virtual machines. We will use simple examples of virtual machines, and gradually introduce more complex virtual machines, linking each one to programming concepts previously covered.

Part 3: Building and Experimenting with Virtual Machines. Here we encourage you to modify and experiment with the provided virtual machine examples. This part includes project ideas for readers to explore. Integrate LLMs to help you debug, optimise, and understand changes. Use exercises at the end of each chapter that ask students to extend the virtual machines or apply them to solve specific problems.

Part 4: Compilers and Advanced Concepts. Introduce compilers and parsing with practical examples. Show how the virtual machines introduced earlier can be used to run compiled code. Provide hands-on projects where students build simple compilers or interpreters for their own small languages.