

Just for Fun: The story of an accidental revolutionary by Linus Torvalds and David Diamond. Texere 2001 (ISBN 1-58799-080-6)

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Just for fun, the story of an accidental revolutionary, is a jolly good read. It's conversation style, and lighthearted attitude make it accessible, and quite compelling. This book would be a good introduction into the motivations behind some people's contributions to open source for the uninitiated.

Just for Fun is the story of Linus' life up to about 2001, told with the assistance of David Diamond (a journalist). The age of the book means that some of the book reads as a little out of date, for example Linus speaks extensively about the dot com bubble, which obviously hadn't burst at the time that Linus is writing.

Rather conveniently, it appears that Linus has had a very easy to read life, although perhaps it is the literary style. The book is interesting, fun, and very very easy to read. Importantly to me, Linus doesn't pretend to have written the entire book himself, which is clearly not the case. Interspersed throughout the book are commentary segments written by David Diamond. Linus also seems to have his head screwed on the right way — the irony of his position as a geek god by accident doesn't escape him. There are even passages in the book where you can see glimpses of Linus himself questioning his own fame.

Just for Fun starts and ends with Linus attempting to explain his theory of the meaning of life, which is something along the lines of that all things go through three evolutionary stages: survival; social order; and the entertainment. For example, people started fighting initially to ensure survival, then they fought for social status, and now wars are waged as a form of entertainment on CNN and gaming consoles everywhere. Linus argues that a similar progression applies to software as well.

The book discusses technical issues briefly, but is written in a way which is accessible for non-technical people. Linus and David spend a fair bit of time trying to explain open source, and what motivates people to contribute to open source. *Just for fun* would be a good book to hand to someone who wants to understand open source more, but isn't openly hostile to the concept initially.

To me, as someone already comfortable with open source, the best bit of the book was starting to understand what motivated Linus to start writing Linux. I've been fielding lots of questions about that at work recently, and now I have some sort of answer that actually makes sense forming in the back of my brain. In summary, Linus was a geek who hid in his room a lot — not just because of the fantastic weather Finnish winter weather, his rather traumatic sounding childhood had something to do with it as well — who wanted to learn how to use his new 386 better. He therefore wrote a terminal emulator. Next, he wanted to be able to save files to disc in his terminal emulator, which ran on the bare 386 hardware, so he added a disc driver. After this, it dawned on Linus that he had started an operating system.

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Despite it's age, *Just for fun* is a jolly good read, and I would recommend it.