
**The
UNIX-
HATERS
Handbook**



Dennis Ritchie

Anti-Foreword

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To the contributors to this book:

I have succumbed to the temptation you offered in your preface: I do write you off as envious malcontents and romantic keepers of memories. The systems you remember so fondly (TOPS-20, ITS, Multics, Lisp Machine, Cedar/Mesa, the Dorado) are not just out to pasture, they are fertilizing it from below.

Your judgments are not keen, they are intoxicated by metaphor. In the Preface you suffer first from heat, lice, and malnourishment, then become prisoners in a Gulag. In Chapter 1 you are in turn infected by a virus, racked by drug addiction, and addled by puffiness of the genome.

Yet your prison without coherent design continues to imprison you. How can this be, if it has no strong places? The rational prisoner exploits the weak places, creates order from chaos: instead, collectives like the FSF vindicate their jailers by building cells almost com-

patible with the existing ones, albeit with more features. The journalist with three undergraduate degrees from MIT, the researcher at Microsoft, and the senior scientist at Apple might volunteer a few words about the regulations of the prisons to which they have been transferred.

Your sense of the possible is in no sense pure: sometimes you want the same thing you have, but wish you had done it yourselves; other times you want something different, but can't seem to get people to use it; sometimes one wonders why you just don't shut up and tell people to buy a PC with Windows or a Mac. No Gulag or lice, just a future whose intellectual tone and interaction style is set by Sonic the Hedgehog. You claim to seek progress, but you succeed mainly in whining.

Here is my metaphor: your book is a pudding stuffed with apposite observations, many well-conceived. Like excrement, it contains enough undigested nuggets of nutrition to sustain life for some. But it is not a tasty pie: it reeks too much of contempt and of envy.

Bon appetit!