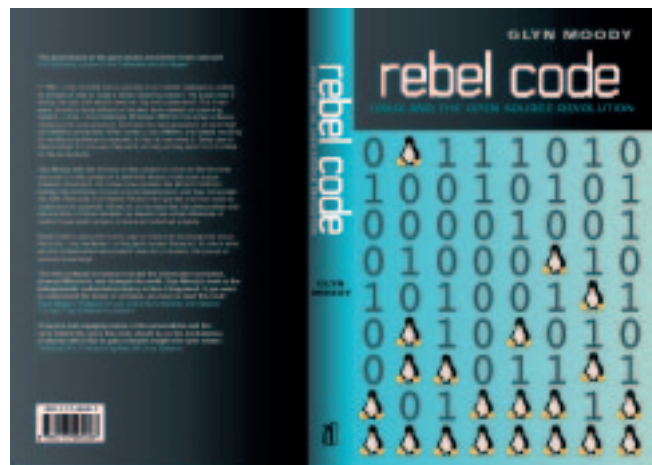


Rebel Code: Linux and the Open Source revolution by

Glyn Moody

REBEL YELL

ALISON DAVIES



In *Rebel Code* Glyn Moody weaves the disparate strands of the stories around the Open Source phenomenon into a cohesive and exciting narrative. In essence, it's the story of how in less than ten years Linux went from being a project to fill some spare time in a student's Christmas holiday to a system capable of rivalling Microsoft's domination of the software world. The book examines the beginning of the free software movement going back to 1984 and Richard Stallman's GNU project and follows how developments from that affected the growth of Linux and vice versa. It traces the history behind all the major projects connected to the development of Linux such as Apache, Perl and Sendmail, and examines the personalities and the anecdotes surrounding them. It is this that makes *Rebel Code* such an entertaining read.

We are told about the reasons behind the development of the various distributions, both existing and ones that are no longer used, and how fear of fragmentation has prevented them from forking too far apart. As an interesting aside Moody reveals the reasons behind many of the, often idiosyncratic, names, such as Debian deriving from its creator, Ian Murdock's own name, and that of his wife, Deb. Glyn Moody has drawn from a variety of sources including interviews with figures in Open Source who have been reluctant to speak before to give a clear picture of what happened in those hectic years. He examines how the Internet has such a bearing on the development of Linux and how in turn Linux assisted in the growth of the World Wide Web, as we know it today.

There is much about the various types of licensing agreements, from the original copyleft designed by Stallman to the various modifications made to allow commercial use of the programmes while still allowing the code to be freely accessible. In the chapter Trolls versus Gnomes he follows the development of graphics for Linux and the rivalry between the supporters of the proprietary programme KDE and the free software, Gnome and how the company, TrollTech, was finally persuaded to use the GNU General Public Licence, as drawn up by Stallman.

Moody explains all the terms and acronyms that can sometimes put people off reading about the computer industry, yet the book contains enough detail to be interesting even to readers who already know much of the story. After covering the early history of Linux, he also conjectures about might-have-beens. What would have happened if Netscape had bought RedHat in 1998? He devotes a chapter to the struggles in 1999 between Microsoft and the Linux community over the comparison between Windows NT and GNU Linux with Samba; the battle for fair testing and the admission that Linux needed further work before it could out perform the Redmond giant.

Arguments and counter arguments over the 'weaknesses' of Linux (as perceived by Microsoft and documented on their website in October 1998) are traced. This is followed by a brief description of how Linux has improved since then and a mention of the project, WINE, to allow the running of unmodified Windows applications on a GNU/Linux system is included. Moody then heads into the future with the Intel Itanium chip and 64 bit processing.

In the last part of the book he describes how Linux has been taken up by all the major hardware companies and looks at the way forward with the use of Linux in modern embedded technologies. He describes how Linux is being taken up around the world, in markets as yet unexploited by Microsoft, such as China and India and how Mexico has started a project to install Linux in schools and hopefully encourage a new generation of hackers.

Above all, this book is about the conflict between big business and the profit motive and the belief that the chance to develop and improve software is a freedom that should be available to all. The question over whether in the long term such altruistic motives can win over the desire for commercial success he leaves unanswered – only time will tell, but in the meantime the story behind those principles is a very enjoyable and optimistic read.

In the spirit of Open Source Penguin Books UK have made the first three chapters of *Rebel Code* available for free on <http://www.penguin.co.uk> ■