



Foreword

To the newcomer, the computer world can seem pretty forbidding. The secret codes for operating these metal beasts are under the control of mysterious geeks who speak some language that sounds like English but makes no sense. Even if you manage to master some corner of the computer continuum, the rug can be pulled out from under you without warning. A program that seemed tame will suddenly grow fangs. The way you've been doing things for months will stop working without notice.

Once you've managed to tame the beast even a little it seems like masochism to consider switching to another operating system, but for many of us who use, and suffer with, Windows, the choice to continue to use that spawn of Microsoft may seem masochistic, too.

Spyware, viruses, blue screens of death, confused user interfaces, buggy programs, security flaws, the list of problems with Windows seems endless. Many Windows users wonder if there's a better way, but dread the idea of learning to tame another beast.

Well, as Marcel Gagné has been showing us for years in his superb books, his "Cooking with Linux" columns, and on my TV show, *Call for Help*, there is a better way, and it's called Linux. Until recently Linux was the choice of cellar-dwelling computer geeks and four-eyed server administrators. The idea of a normal person using Linux on his or her desktop for day-to-day work was far-fetched to say the least. All that is changing, due in part to the success of Ubuntu Linux.

Ubuntu was created with one goal: to make a desktop version of Linux that everyone can use, and I think the team has succeeded marvelously.

Finally there's a version of Linux I'd feel comfortable giving to my mom. It comes with a great range of applications without falling prey to the common "everything including the kitchen sink" approach of many other Linux distributions. You'll find just what you need on your Ubuntu installation, with little or no fatty excess. Oh, and by the way, there's a version for you server geeks, too.

Of course, because Ubuntu, as all Linux distributions, bundles applications from the Free Software Foundation, the Apache Software Foundation, OpenOffice.org, and many other open source software groups, you get a great variety of powerful well-designed programs. Ubuntu includes more than 16,000 individual applications (even though it fits on one CD). You'll find tools for almost anything you can think to do with a computer including a full office suite, Web server software, and programming tools. Yet all that power and complexity is wrapped in a very slick, easy to use user interface that's, frankly, a whole lot better than Windows.

It's pretty mind-blowing that a free operating system can best one that costs hundreds of dollars and is backed by a hundred-billion-dollar corporation, but it's true. The essential verity of the open source software movement is that programmers who are doing what they love will always do a better job than programmers who are working merely to make a living.

As well designed as Ubuntu is, however, it's still terra incognita for the Windows user. Where's my Start menu? they plead. What happened to the Control Panel and My Network Neighborhood? Fear not intrepid operating system explorer, this book will clear a path in the jungle, and you'll find yourself at home with Ubuntu in just a few short weeks.

So come on in. No secret knock is necessary. The only password you'll need is the one you create yourself to secure your system. The Linux and free software community welcome you with open arms. There is a better way, and this book is your first step toward freedom.



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