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Hackers & Painters: Big Ideas From The Computer Age



Synopsis

"The computer world is like an intellectual Wild West, in which you can shoot anyone you wish with your ideas, if you're willing to risk the consequences. " --from Hackers & Painters: Big Ideas from the Computer Age, by Paul Graham

We are living in the computer age, in a world increasingly designed and engineered by computer programmers and software designers, by people who call themselves hackers. Who are these people, what motivates them, and why should you care? Consider these facts: Everything around us is turning into computers. Your typewriter is gone, replaced by a computer. Your phone has turned into a computer. So has your camera. Soon your TV will. Your car was not only designed on computers, but has more processing power in it than a room-sized mainframe did in 1970. Letters, encyclopedias, newspapers, and even your local store are being replaced by the Internet.

Hackers & Painters: Big Ideas from the Computer Age, by Paul Graham, explains this world and the motivations of the people who occupy it. In clear, thoughtful prose that draws on illuminating historical examples, Graham takes readers on an unflinching exploration into what he calls "an intellectual Wild West." The ideas discussed in this book will have a powerful and lasting impact on how we think, how we work, how we develop technology, and how we live. Topics include the importance of beauty in software design, how to make wealth, heresy and free speech, the programming language renaissance, the open-source movement, digital design, internet startups, and more.

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Customer Reviews

Paul Graham , designer of the new Arc language, was the creator of Yahoo Store, the first web-based application. His technique for spam filtering inspired most current filters. He has a PhD in Computer Science from Harvard and studied painting at RISD and the Accademia in Florence.

Not to get too personal but Paul's essays speak to my soul. His blog is the first one i recommend for founders and one I keep going back to. Oh the chapter about nerds! oh my. Growing up a severe bookworm I always felt traditional schooling was the kid version of the shawshank redemption. Apparently I wasn't the only one. What this Paul fellow is doing with his ycombinator startup monopoly in Silicon Valley is fixing the inefficiencies of a broken school system and sharing the education on his blog and youtube. If you haven't seen Stanford CS -183b (his is lecture 3) it is a refreshing reminder of where the focus should be ~ learning how to create things people actually want not gaming and tricking the system with a bunch of hype.

Paul Graham's "Hackers and Painters" is a collection of separate articles from Paul. The articles are well written and funny, though I frequently did not agree with the content. Since one of the earlier articles was on censorship, I'd say... that was probably the intention :) The first article is triggered by Paul's growing up and asks why nerds are unpopular when you are younger. He explores memories of his childhood and tries to clarify them. He continues with a article after which the book is named. He explains that he has *some* education in painting and explores the similarity between hacking and painting. The next couple chapters are an attack to taboos in general. What can we say? Why can we say that? And he claims that hackers are more comfortable breaking taboos, breaking the rules. In the article "The road ahead" he is making predictions related to web-based server software, of which some are insightful (or were insightful). He claims that server-based software will be the future and the recent years have certainly shown that to be true. The next couple of articles relate to capitalism and I did disagree with a lot of the statements he made in here. Though, often his points are carefully crafted.. here I found them simplistic. It annoyed me and even thought about stop reading it. The well-written-ness made me continue though. The middle of the book contains an article about spam. This one doesn't fit well in the book and could have better left out, in my opinion. The last articles in the book relate to programming languages and were fun to read. Paul is a serious Lisp fan and tries to argue about programming languages in such a way that it always supports his choice of lisp. He does make a couple of good points. All in all, I've enjoyed reading "Hackers & Painters". Its an easy read with interesting strong opinions from Paul. I'd rate it between 3 and 4 stars, mainly because the amount of learning is not high. Though, I remember some articles

got me laughing out loud, so decided to go for a 4. Worth reading if you like strong opinions relate to hacker cultures.

Paul Graham is a great thinker, this book is filled with fascinating insights. Do note that he's not always right - there are a few small things he says that demonstrate some kind of misunderstanding - but overall it's pretty bloody great. If you're not into Software, just skip the couple of chapters on that - even my Mum loved this book.

Disclaimer: I'm a big fan of Paul Graham's writing and works. I've been reading his blog for ages, and am a somewhat obsessive reader of his website Hacker News. I recently decided to purchase and read Graham's book, "Hackers & Painters", to casually read through some of his favorite essays. This book is comprised of 15 of Graham's essays pulled from his blog, which he updates several times a year. The topics of his essays are diverse, but all represent a hacker's point of view. What makes this book worth reading is that you get inside of Paul Graham's mind. He has an amazingly clear writing style (one that I am extremely fond of), and is able to walk you through his thoughts and arguments in a clear manner. If you're at all interested in entrepreneurship, technology, or programming, I would give this book a read. It can be read casually in a day or so, and will make you think deeply about the topics discussed for weeks afterwards.

This book is really good. This book is well written for the non computer literate person. I finished it in about 2 days. Paul is a awesome writer and I'm going to buy some more books of his! I'm going to read this book again. One last thing, the essays in this book are awesome!

Although many of the essays contained are available online, this collection was well worth the price of admission. There are many skilled writers out there; there are many talented programmers--however, very rarely do the two skill-sets overlap in one person. Mr. Graham happens to be one of those individuals, and this is easily some of the best computer science writing I've come across. High marks

I enjoyed the book. It's got good advice for hackers that are trying to start their own startup for business or for fun. I guess it's advice you get when your in YC just not personalized for your startup. Even for non hackers it's a good book to understand that approach and how important is to have that technical founder in your startup.

Really easy to read and to understand the concept of software development. I love how Paul organically connect painting with programming. I think both are a process of thinking and creating.

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