The *Nixed Report

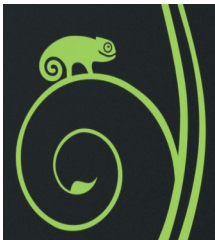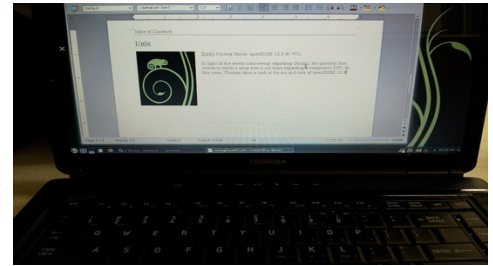FIGHT THE POWER!

GEORGE ORWELL 1984

Table of Contents
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This issue's ./ column talks about getting computers on the cheap or even free in some cases. (P. 3)

Unix

 The Computers Are Multiplying: Toshiba Satellite L305-S5921, (P. 5)

A new computer has been added to the tech family at The *Nixed Report. This Toshiba notebook will allow for more in depth reviews of operating systems, such as openSUSE 12.3

Distro Journey Series: openSUSE 12.3 (P. 6)

In light of the recent controversy regarding Ubuntu, the question that comes to mind is what else is out there regarding a computer's OS? In this issue, Thomas takes a look at the ins and outs of openSUSE 12.3.

Overlooked Pop Culture

 Book Review: 1984 (P. 11)

The world seems to be filled with surveillance these days. In 1949, George Orwell published a book that was so popular, it became a movie and was used by Apple in order to portray IBM as Big Brother. Thomas reviews the book that partially predicted a surveillance society inside of a police state.

 Staff Profile: Stephen Kelley (P. 14)

Stephen is the intellectual amplifier of the official podcast. Going above and beyond, he finds extra content to supplement the topics that are discussed, which is why he is featured in this issue's Staff Profile.
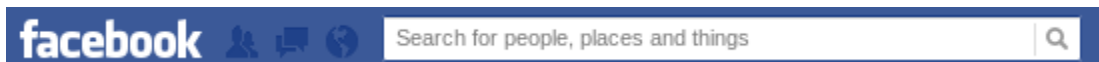
Obtaining Tech on the Cheap or Free of Charge

By Thomas Holbrook II

Window shopping for computers or gadgets can be fun, yet depressing. The price tags often prevent many from being able to obtain what they truly desire. Whether one is a student or an entrepreneur, there are plenty of opportunities to acquire these things at a very low price or for free with no strings attached. Knowing where to look is prudent.

Online

Believe it or not, social networking sites such as Facebook may have a group targeted towards your local community. Warrensburg, Missouri has a swap and shop page that allows members to either look for items or sell them. The way to find such groups is to use the search function at the top of the screen.

Craigslist is another place to look for cheap electronics. Point your browser to craigslist.org, look for your region, your country, your state, and the city nearest you. Classifieds can be listed either seeking something, giving something away, or selling something. Exercising caution is prudent when dealing with people on this site.

Always ask to see the item in question. If possible, meet the other person in a public place when looking at said item. When a transaction involves money, always obtain a receipt for your records.

Auction sites such as ebay.com will also provide a plethora of options when it comes to cheap electronics. Look at the seller's rating and read the reviews. If somebody gives them a low rating, see if the seller responds. Always exercise due diligence.

Sometimes the Federal Government may offer assistance. Often enough, various branches of the military or agencies will sell off older equipment when they upgrade. Point your browser to the following URL:

http://www.usa.gov/shopping/supplies/supplies.shtml

Other places include chat rooms online as well as instant messaging services. Internet forums can also be of assistance depending on the situation. Again, due diligence is extremely prudent. Always take screenshots using the PRTSCR key on your keyboard so you may create a paper trail by printing said screenshots.

Most importantly, keep records of every transaction.

<u>Offline</u>

The Internet is a valuable resource when seeking items desired. However, there are areas that are often overlooked. Some places to look may include local businesses and charitable organizations. It all depends on the area in which one lives.

I once obtained some hardware from a high school that was going to throw them away. For the first time, I was able to tinker with desktop hardware, even though it consisted of Pentium II systems. Another instance of obtaining a computer for free occurred when I showed up at a yard sale. The lady gave away a notebook system that had the LCD screen removed from it; a CRT was used to replace it.

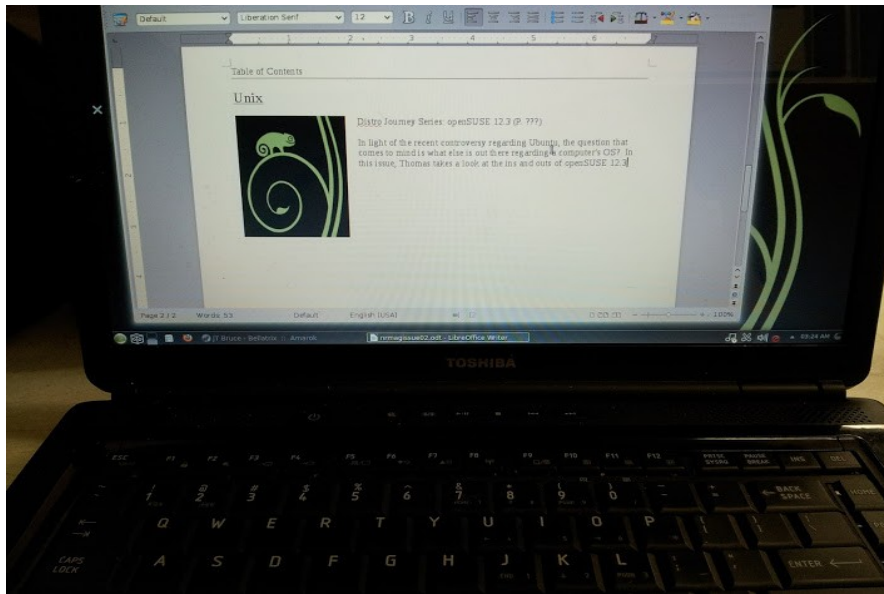Here are some other places to obtain electronics on the cheap:

- Pawn Shops: Always remember to take a can of air to whatever computer system you get. There is no telling where it came from or what environment it had to endure. If anything is problematic, take it back the next day (most places have a 24 hour policy).
- Computer Repair Shops: They often sell older systems that businesses no longer need. They often have warranties included. If looking for older hardware, such as PCI video cards, one may get lucky. At a repair business in Warrensburg, I was able to obtain a working card for $20, and they only charged a service fee, thus saving me money.
- Air Force Bases: In the past, Whiteman Air Force Base would sell off their old electronics. Keep in mind that most computer systems coming from any military installation may not have a hard drive; this is to avoid leaking information not meant for public consumption.
- Yard Sales/Garage Sales: Most of the time, clothes are the mainstay. Once in a while, a pleasant surprise may be had.
- Colleges and Schools: At some point, educational institutions will upgrade their hardware. They may either have an auction or simply give them away. Always inquire before the summer begins. There are also students who have more money than sense, so curb hunting at college dorms is also an effective strategy.
- Flee Markets: One may never know what can be found there. I mostly found old NES games there, but one could get lucky.
- Other people: Not entirely a place, but there are times when individuals may want to get rid of what they have. I once was offered a couple of systems for free, but I lost contact with that person. Sometimes people just want the machines to go to good use instead of being thrown away. It never hurts to ask around. Plus, if somebody is moving out of an apartment complex and there is bunch of things by the dumpster, take a look, for a pleasant surprise may await.
- The clearance section of big box retail: The podcast that Stephen Kelley and I do was made possible by cheap microphones that were obtained via clearance. Throwing in a headphone splitter from an audio kit, the cost was approximately $20 USD.

<u>Conclusion</u>

By looking hard enough in the right places, one can find the electronics, whether it be computers or gadgets, for relatively cheap. In some cases, no money will be required. Just be sure to exercise due diligence, and in some cases, wearing latex gloves.

By Thomas Holbrook II

When I first had the idea of reviewing multiple operating systems in depth, I realized that having a variety of hardware is a must. I had three systems already, but the hardware did not vary that much.

In addition to the HP Elite 410y desktop, the ZaReason Breeze 3110, and Acer Aspire One 722, I now have a Toshiba Satellite L305-25921. It was obtained at Central Pawn in Warrensburg, Missouri for less than $200 USD. It has the following specifications:

- Dual Core Pentium T3400
- 2 GB RAM
- Intel GMA X4500 (mobile version)
- 120 GB Hard Drive
- DVD burner
- 1280x800 LCD Display
- Multimedia buttons
- Atheros Wireless adapter
- Ethernet controller
- VGA Port
- 3 USB Ports

Now that I have two systems with Intel hardware inside, the goal is to acquire a desktop and notebook with NVIDIA graphics to round out the reviews. I would also like to obtain another notebook with a dedicated AMD GPU instead of an APU (accelerated processing unit). For now, I have enough variety in hardware to write an in depth piece about OpenSUSE 12.3 (this issue).

Distro Journey Series: openSUSE 12.3

By Thomas Holbrook II

In the last issue, Ubuntu 12.04 was the first stop. It was so tempting to stick with it, because of the stability it had. However, on the Acer Aspire One 722, there was a snag.

The microphone port refused to cooperate. For that reason, I decided to start the Distro Journey Series again so as to evaluate different operating systems from the perspective of the individual user. In this issue, I take a look at openSUSE 12.3 utilizing the following systems:

ZaReason Breeze 3110

- 1.6 GHz Intel Atom CPU
- 1 GB RAM
- 320 GB Hard Drive
- DVD-ROM Drive
- Intel GMA 950 Graphics

Toshiba Satellite L305-S5921

- Dual Core Pentium T3400 (Max Speed: 2.16 GHz)
- 2 GB RAM
- Intel GMA X4500 Graphics (mobile version)
- 120 GB Hard Drive
- DVD burner
- 1280x800 LCD Display
- Multimedia buttons
- Atheros Wireless adapter
- Ethernet controller
- VGA Port
- 3 USB Ports

Acer Aspire One 722

- Dual-Core AMD C60 (Max Speed: 1.33 GHz)
- AMD Radeon HD 6250 Graphics
- 2 GB RAM
- 320 GB Hard Drive
- Ethernet
- Atheros Wireless Adapter
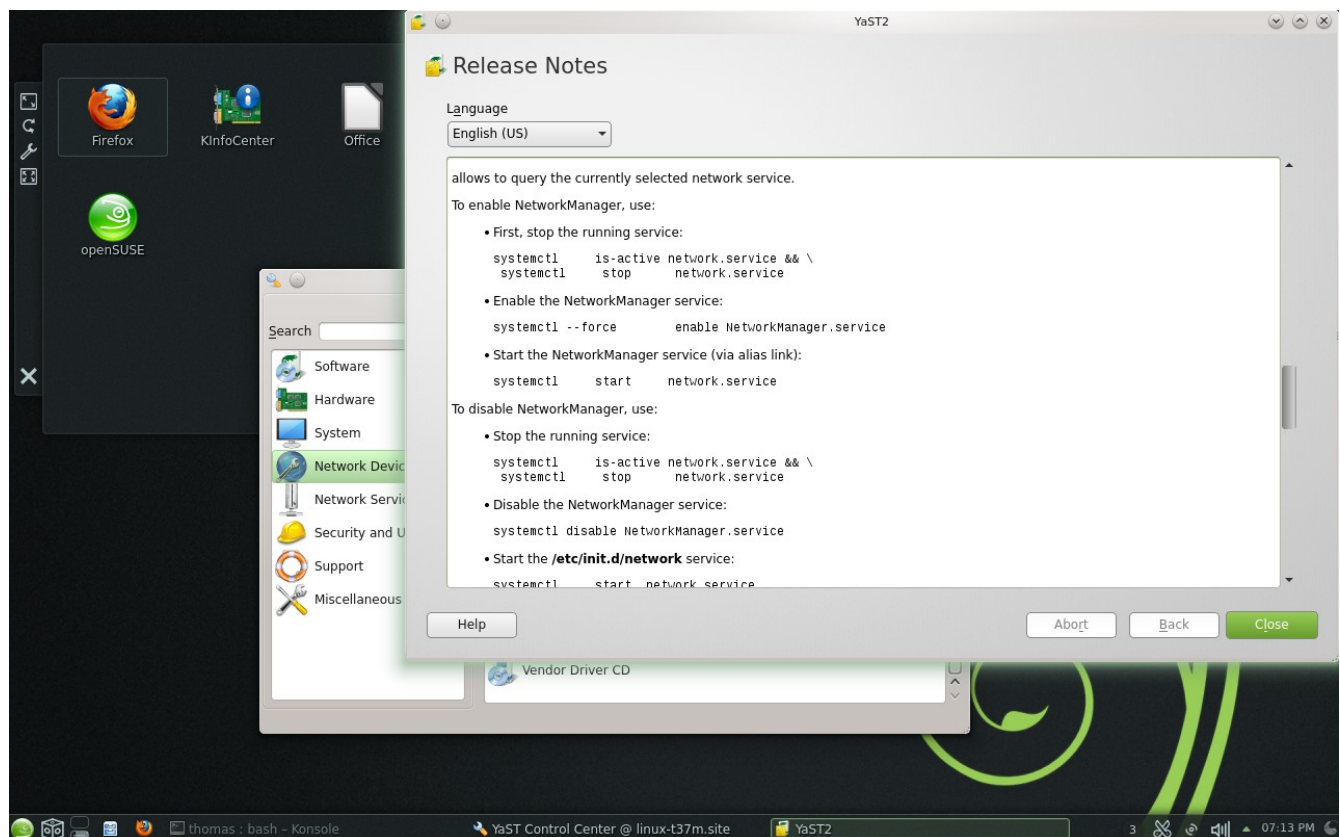- LCD with 1366x768 resolution and integrated webcam.

HP Pavilion Elite 410y

- AMD Phenom II X6 1045T (Max Speed: 3.2 GHz)
- 8 GB RAM
- AMD Radeon HD5570 with 1 GB RAM
- 1 Terabyte Hard Drive
- Ethernet
- Wireless adapter (note used)

So essentially, AMD hardware is squaring off against Intel hardware. The network install was used on all systems. The 64-bit edition was installed on the desktop. A USB DVD-ROM drive was used with the Aspire One 722 due to issues with creating a bootable USB thumb drive.

Installation

With the Acer and Toshiba, I was able to install the OS utilizing my WiFi connection. Due to encryption being used, I was asked for the password, and once provided, network-based installation went off without a hitch. Ironically, I had to consult the release notes in order to enable networking after the installation completed without having to reboot.
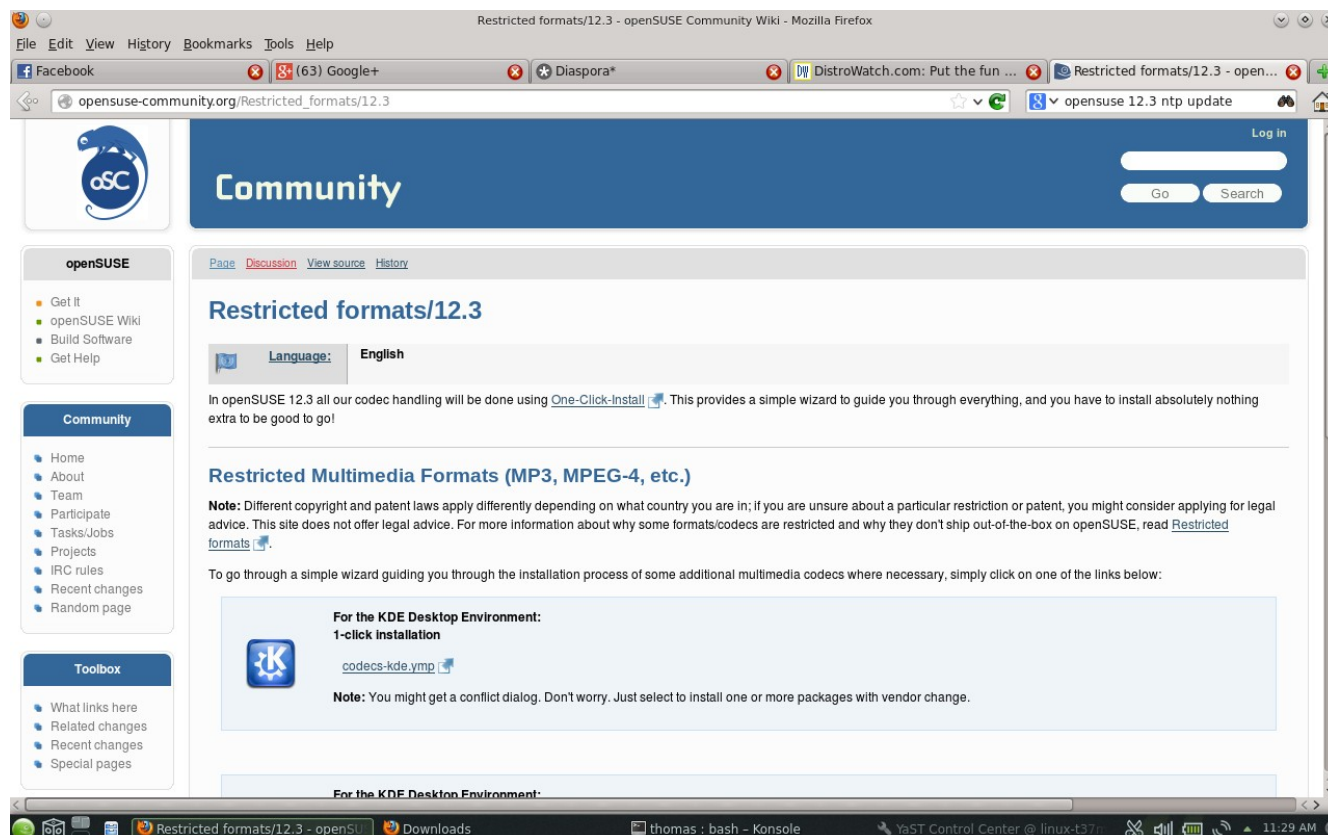

It is important to note that subsequent patches have been issued to resolve the issue.

Installation on the Breeze and Pavillion completed without any issues. The one mistake I made was grabbing the Flash plugin on my own through openSUSE's online portal instead of using the update mechanism.

This means I am not able to obtain an update to security fixes to Flash, because I grabbed an "unstable" package. I did not make the same mistake on the other systems as they were 32-bit. Through the update functionality, I was able to obtain Flash and other multimedia codecs for out of the box performance.

Whether it was through YaST or Apper, I was shown a license box that I head to agree to in order to add the multimedia functionality. In terms of proprietary Catalyst drivers for AMD hardware, I had to consult opensuse-community.org.

The one click installation came in handy when it involved added functionality and improved performance from different drivers.

Performance

KDE 4.10 was surprisingly snappy on the Breeze, despite only having a single gigabyte of RAM. It likely helped that I chose not to run more than one application at the same time. The open drivers worked quite well for the graphics chips on both the Toshiba and Breeze.

The HP desktop's UI performance improved with the Catalyst drivers installed. The same could not be said for the Aspire One 722. Then again, it should come as no surprise that an Accelerated Processing Unit (APU) would be better off using free and open source drivers, albeit without hardware video decoding capabilities.

KDE seemed more responsive with open drivers on the Aspire One 722. Other than that, things were stable across all systems.

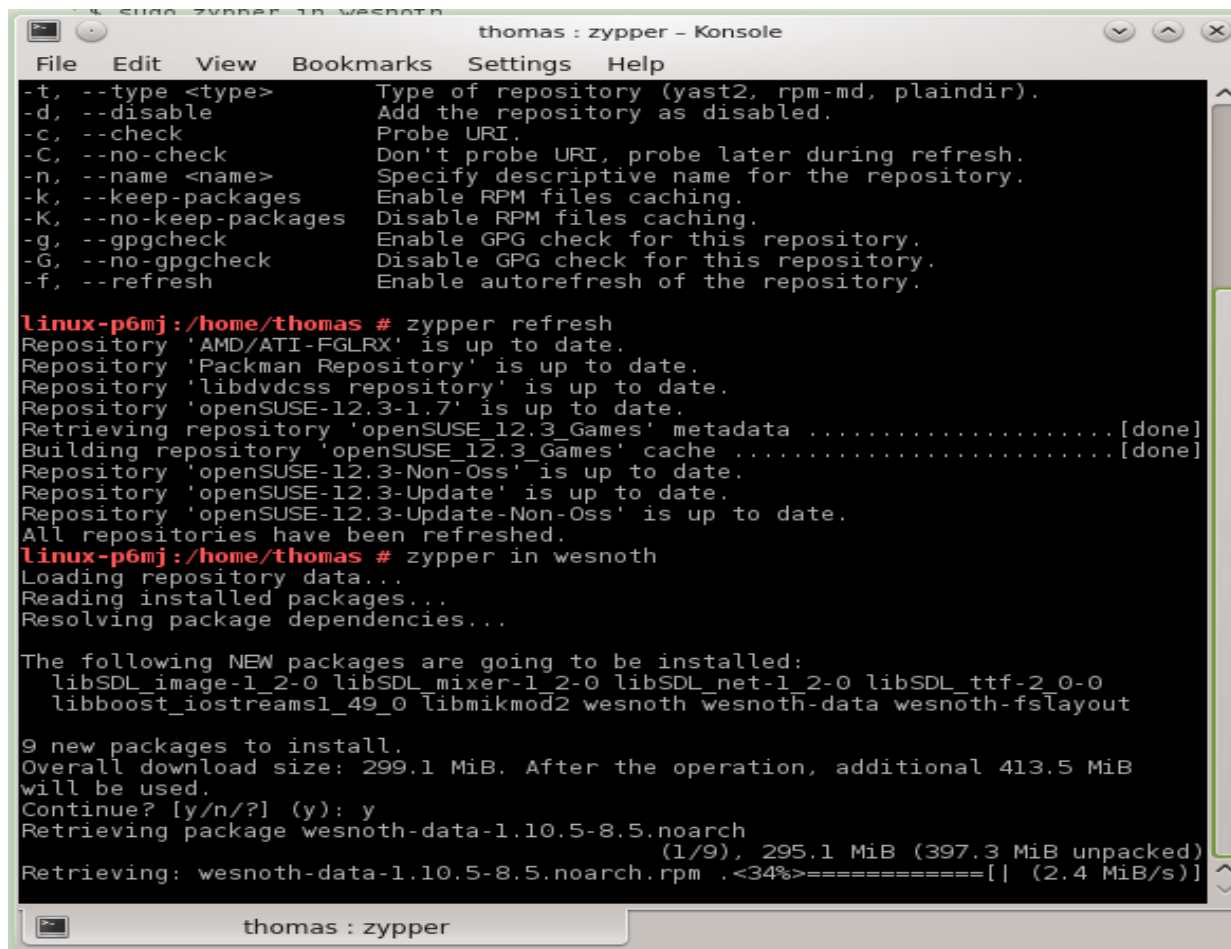When it came to the Pavillion, KDE would crash, but recover immediately after.

Default Apps and How Well They Worked

For web browsing, Firefox is the mainstay. Konqueror is also available as well. LibreOffice 3.6 is included for productivity purposes and was used to put this issue together. Amarok for music, podcasts, and streaming audio fits the bill when it doesn't crash (mostly due to streaming audio).

I also didn't like how I had to specifically enter a tag that identified which track a certain song was in an album in order for the default audio player to organize the songs by track number.

Kmail had issues with configuring my e-mail account set up through my web hosting provider, so I simply installed Thunderbird. On the Aspire One 722, I installed VLC so I could listen to streaming Internet radio without having a browser open and without the player crashing.

There was also an issue with installing Wesnoth on the desktop. While attempting a one click install produced errors, I was able to successfully use zypper in the terminal.

Other than a few hiccups, all systems ran stable for several weeks.

What I liked

The stability and performance was top notch. The netbook did not seem to respond well to the Catalyst drivers, but the developers of the project do not really have control over the build quality of proprietary drivers.

The default selection of applications may suite most user's needs, though installing additional applications through one click installations via a web page or through YaST is recommended for additional functionality. In some cases, replacing an unstable application with a different one is also advisable.

Good news for all you gamers as well. It is possible to get Steam working as well. I am not speaking of using WINE, the compatibility layer, but the native build of the popular game platform and distribution system.

Though some may raise an eyebrow or two at the security implications, I find it convenient that Apper allows for updates to be installed without being root (system admin).

What can be better

Though I am sure it is more of an issue with KDE than openSUSE, it would be nice to be able to listen to 8bitx without Amarok crashing. Also, if certain codecs along with Flash were offered during the OS installation procedure, it would be more convenient for the home user. Flashing a license agreement before the user's eyes during installation of the system is no different than doing so during a software update.

In other words, they can ask if one wants to install additional software for added multimedia functionality while offering a disclaimer explaining the legal issues involved depending on which country the user resides in. In my mind, that would be more appropriate than forcing the individual to wait until they get to check for updates after installation.

When using third party repositories, changing vendors regarding certain software packages can get confusing. If the user does not know what they are doing, their system could easily break. Changing the wording might be helpful.

For example, if K3B, a popular CD/DVD burning application, were to come from multiple repositories, a phrase that says, "K3B is available (without support for [insert library/feature name here]) in [default repository], but it's also available in [name repository here] with [include added are reduced features/libraries here]," would be much more helpful than simply saying there is a potential conflict that could break things.

In other words, when it comes to third party software, the user should be asked if they want a certain piece of software to come from the default repository or the third party repository.

Conclusion

Though there were some hiccups, openSUSE 12.3 reminds me why I liked SUSE so much back in the day. It has decent speed, plenty of stability, and plenty of third party repositories via one click on a web page. I would highly recommend new users give it a shot by grabbing it from opensuse.org.

Book Review: 1984

By: Thomas Holbrook II

"Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past"

For my 30th birthday I purchased a gift for myself that cost less than $10.00 USD. It was one of the books that I knew about for several years, yet for the first time that I know of, I would read all of it. George Orwell's 1984 has sold so well that a movie version was made.

As they say, sometimes reading the book is better than watching the film. This piece of literature was far from disappointing.

The story's main protagonist, Wintson Smith, works at the Ministry of Truth editing news stories from the past so that it always agrees with The Party. When a party member falls out of favor, they are erased from history.

The irony is that the Ministry of Truth is involved with printing lies and misinformation. The primary objective is to manipulate public opinion. Throughout the years, Oceania would fight Eurasia or Eastasia. Whoever the country was at war with, would be the eternal mortal enemy.

If Oceania was at war with Eurasia, they were always at war with Eurasia. Records would be altered to indicate as such. The Times, Oceana's newspaper, would often have its archives edited as well to reflect the party line.

The world in 1984 is practically upside down. The party line is as follows:

- War is peace
- Freedom is slavery
- Ignorance is strength

The perceived main enemy of Oceania is not a country, but an individual. Emmanuel Goldstein, the alleged former inner party member who rebelled later on, is often used as the boogeyman so that the entire population gives up all their rights.

The two minutes of hate is organized on a regular basis to ensure loyalty to Oceania and those who rule it. A video is played of Goldstein talking about freedom of speech among other topics while people booed, hissed, and told him to shut up.

The population is constantly starved by its rulers, yet the people often believe they are better off than before. Such contradictory things are involved in a concept known as doublethink. It's a form of brainwashing used to manipulate the population into going along with whatever The Party dictates.

Winston eventually stumbles upon a shop and purchases a blank book along with appropriate writing utensils. He starts a diary back at his apartment in Victory Mansions in a spot where a book shelf had once been years ago.

Upon being frightened by a female party loyalist while being reassured with a sympathetic glance from O'Brien during the session of two minutes of hate, Smith starts writing in his diary.

Fortunately for him, it was out of view of the telescreen, a device that can broadcast messages as well as transmit them from people who watch them. They act as a form of entertainment while spying on the people to make sure they don't commit a thought crime. If caught, the Thought Police hauls the offending person off to the Ministry of Love to be brainwashed back into compliance before being killed.

Winston dislikes The Party and its propaganda. He's no fan of Big Brother and how he constantly watches the entire population of Oceania. He hears of The Brotherhood, a group allegedly led by Goldstein. He considers himself dead for he has committed a thought crime.

The woman who had scared him actually fell in love with him. Her name was Julia, and they would eventually begin a love affair. Smith would rent a room above the shop in which he bought the diary. Life seems to be going grand until O'Brien meets him in front of a telescreen at work under the pretense of offering an advanced copy of latest edition of the Newspeak dictionary.

He eventually takes Julia to O'Brien's living quarters in order to declare that he is against the party and wants to join The Brotherhood. O'Brien offers instructions for obtaining Goldstein's book, and sends the two on their way. While Smith does come into possession of the book, it turns out to be a ruse.

The shop owner in question was actually a member of the Thought Police the whole time. O'Brien was never really a member of the opposition. He had been watching Smith for seven years and determined him to be a threat.

Through various forms of torture, Smith is brainwashed and reintroduced into Oceanic society with a different job and a more intense addiction to Victory Gin. At the end of the novel, after a successful military attack, he begins to love Big Brother, an indication that he was about to be killed.

From start to finish, Smith was doomed just for thinking the wrong thoughts. Anybody that can't be controlled is compromised, then eliminated. The brainwashing and re-education was designed to eliminate martyrdom.

The book does go into quite a bit of description and detail at times. Nonetheless, it is fascinating and still relevant today. The book itself is Totalitarianism 101. The main subject of the book is power and control over everything.

For example, in chapter five of part one, there is a conversation between Smith and one of his comrades, Syme. Syme is one of the individuals responsible for updating the language known as Newspeak. One of the things he said is very profound:

"Don't you know that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten."

By controlling vocabulary, one can control a significant amount of expression. Today, there are many stories about people being offended for one reason or another. War is also a constant theme. In reality, all three major powers of the world have a totalitarian regime that operates in the exact same manner.

The oligarchy operates by keeping its populace in perpetual war to distract them and to drain their resources on a constant basis.

Above all, there is nothing noble about The Party. In chapter three of part three of the book, O'Brien explains the goals of The Party:

"Now I will tell you the answer to my question. It is this. The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps even believed, that if they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me? "

The brutal honesty of The Party regarding the subject of power is what sets it apart from all the other major forces in the real world. There is no pretense of nobility. Only pure power is the goal.

Perceived enemies are also to be kept alive in the minds of the people in order to rally them. When Smith asks O'Brien whether The Brotherhood was real, he was informed that he would never know one way or another.

If it turned out that such an underground network did not exist, then The Party's propaganda would not have the desired effect on the people. On the other hand, if they did exist, then the potential for people truly joining the group would be too much for the rulers of Oceania.

The overall intent involves turning people into machines that can't feel emotion at all. The one thing O'Brian and other inner members of The Party do not consider is that sooner or later, the pent up fear and hatred would drive the people to want to conquer both Eastasia and Eurasia.

When there is nothing left to conquer, humanity would have turned on itself and self-destruction would begin. That's the trouble with claiming the entire world. At some point, there is nothing left to take. In today's world, people can be disappeared at any moment in the name of national security.

It's even possible that media organizations have altered articles after the fact they were published. The BBC did so regarding an article in 2001 about the 9/11 hijackers. Though it was a small edit, people expressed that they were disturbed by the editing instead of adding a note at the end of the article linking to an update regarding the matter.

Ironically, Eric Blair, who used George Orwell for a pen name, worked at the BBC.

The novel drives home the message of individualism as well as humanity. It is an excellent tome for high school teachers to use in their literary or history courses.

By Thomas Holbrook II

First and foremost, I know that the in-thing for all the "rebellious youths" to do right now is engage in hostile anti-religious rants and put down spiritual people, but should scientists be doing this as well? Some leaders in the field have stated that scientists need to gain allies, not pick fights for no reason, but that seems to fall of deaf ears. Shrouding themselves in the fetishized cape of a fictionalized version of Galileo, many scientists are ready to do battle with religion at the drop of a hat. With scientific funding getting slashed in this rough economy, is it really smart to antagonize five billion people that hold some sort of faith? There is no wonder some folks think that intellectuals are elitist, because most of the time a "let's agree to disagree" viewpoint is off the table, everyone is gunning for the win.

Website: http://anamericanviewofbritishsciencefiction.com/

As a gnostic, he does not follow mindless group think. He prefers spirituality and understanding of the divine through personal experiences than listening to a figurehead lecture at a sermon.

An individual of a different breed, Stephen Kelley follows British Science Fiction, Professional Wrestling, and other topics that are often overlooked. As the co-host of The *Nixed Report podcast, he keeps the ship steady and stable with his calm, cool, collected demeanor.

The keen insight that he offers has strengthened The *Nixed Report as a media venue. He is the one responsible for the introduction and ending credits. Going above and beyond, he always finds supplemental material for each episode, such as sound clips and links to other relevant content.

With that said, he is no stranger to alternative media. Before becoming a part of the website, he wrote his For No Reason columns for DMGICE. He also wrote reviews and offered an in-depth analysis of the Final Fantasy franchise (the games, the movies, and anime series).

On VGChartz, he became notorious for his Top Ten columns. Some of the well known includes, but is not limited to:

- Top Ten Sexually Awkward Video Game Moments
- Top Ten Unintentionally Racist Video Games
- VGC Top Ten: Worst Instances of Videogame Music

In addition to the podcast, he blogs about British Science Fiction on his blog, An American View of British Science Fiction. He is married to Sarah "Seffy" Firkins-Kelley and has two cats, Turlough and Emeraldas.