

Re: Newbie looking for a UNIX

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KEEP TRYING OUT DIFFERENT SYSTEMS

For peace of mind, add a slave HD to your system to try Unices on, and learn to nuke / restore the "master boot record" so it goes back to booting Windows. (Note 1). You can also use the 2nd HD for backing up data and an image your Windows system partition(s) using Linux or Unix, which is also a good thing. (Note 2)

MY PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF VARIOUS ALTERNATIVES I TRIED IN GROWING ORDER OF COMPLICACY

Lycoris: very easy, light but complete (they choose best-of-kind applications for user, and reasonably well), works as advertised, cute eye candy (nicely hacked KDE). Described as an XP clone (less the crap and the world domination). Normally installs without compliers (available on 2nd CD). Slick productivity pack. Good multimedia. \$40. New edition (Update 3) just out. If it's like Update 2 it must be quite mature.

Red Hat: corporate and going to be even more so, said to be solid but not really in my brief experience. A bit of bloat. Prolly the best interface around (hacked both KDE and Gnome). \$\$\$ for the corporate editions. (Fedora, the new development edition is free but said to be highly experimental). Can be installed from CD images on HD.

Libranet

Debian based and 100% compatible, very nice install and management tools. More aggressive than standard Debian in selecting newer apps, yet quite stable. My current favorite. ~\$70.

Debian

Not that difficult, rather conservative, a deluge of available packages, very good net-based install, excellent package management, perhaps less loved than it deserves. Can be installed from the net. Supportive and fairly large community. Free.

Vector

Slackware based, very good on old iron (or very fast on newer comps).

Quick install. \$30?

Gentoo

You decide what you want in, you compile from sources (if you want). Can be tough and long winded, and a learning experience too. You get a system highly optimized for your needs and hardware. Free.

MY NEXT TRIAL: NetBSD.

Really lightweight, fast, equipped to run apps from Linux and all other BSD's under emulation, excellent memory management, ridiculously modest minimum hardware requirements, supposedly broad range of supported HW. But: smallish user base, unsure how hard to imbibe (and install). Other +ves: it's been around 10 years and it's only at version 1.6.1 (i.e. very light on bullshit), there's a pretty cool Live CD for v. 1.6.0.

Both Debian and NetBSD run on a large number of platforms, which is usually a good sign of solidity.

If I were in your shoes, I'd go for Lycoris first.

I mentioned prices. Almost all the above can be dl'ed and installed for free and require \$ and registration for update services and / or a degree support.

I strongly recommend paying for software anyway, even if free, as soon as you can afford it and get something useful out of it.

NOTE 1

Restoring the MBR

– In Linux: you can save the boot record with :

```
dd if=/dev/hda of=/<path>/<filename> bs=512 count=1
```

It can then be restored with:

```
dd if=/<path>/<filename> of=/dev/hda bs=512 count=1
```

If you do not want/need to overwrite the partition table:

```
dd if=/boot/boot.MBR of=/dev/hda bs=446 count=1
```

as the partition table is kept in the last 66 bytes of the MBR.

It's easier to boot Linux from a floppy disk than to recover an MBR from DOS.

Use eg tomsrftb Linux from toms.net.

– In DOS, FDISK /MBR will nuke the MBR and let the PC boot from the 1st partition on the master drive. But backup and recovery is a darn mess.

NOTE 2

Using Linux to back up Windows

At its simplest (for Win9X) you can copy the whole `_content_` of the system partition on a Linux partition, and copy it back if the s. hits the fan.

You can also use more sophisticated means and back an image of that partition onto the other HD or onto CDs:

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<http://mondorescue.norsklinux.no/>