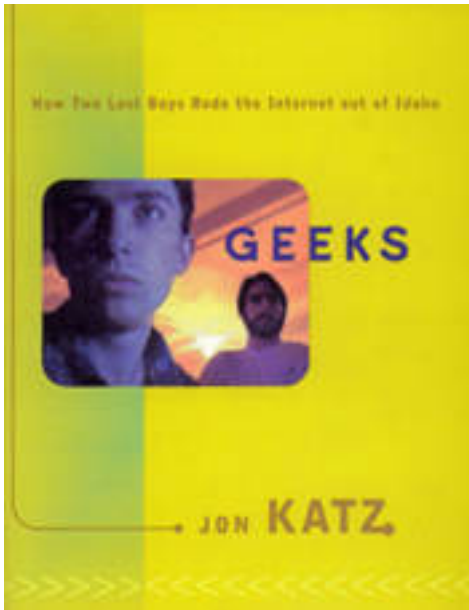


Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet out of Idaho By Jon Katz

Written by Nell Farrell



Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet out of Idaho
By Jon Katz (Villard Books, 2000)

This book will make you wish you'd paid your dues while there was still time. Like learning a foreign language or musical instrument, becoming a geek is best done in the formative years, well, the anti-formative years: adolescence. The very idea that this would be a desirable goal shows that a quick reshuffling of the social hierarchy has occurred. I missed the very possibility of becoming this new kind of geek by just half a generation. And the difference between the traditional geek and the now self-proclaimed, indispensable-to-the-"suits," cutting-edge techno geek is absolute.

"... It makes no sense to try, or even to want, to fit into a place where you don't belong.... It's not g

—Jesse Dailey
protagonist de Geeks.

Letter received by the author from a geek.

Page 3 of the book The reasons why, on the other hand, are the same as they always were. Alien

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Jon Katz became interested in investigating the cultural phenomenon of what he calls Geek Ascension, and began communicating via e-mail with many people who identify themselves as such. And that's how he met Jesse Daily.

"He was a working-class geek who had done almost everything it was possible to do to and with a computer, and who'd graduated from high school a year earlier, Jesse wrote. He was working unenthusiastically but diligently in a small computer shop in dreary Caldwell [Idaho]. He shared an apartment with a classmate and fellow Geek Club alumnus, Eric Twilegar, who had a different kind of dead-end job: selling computers at Office Max in nearby Nampa. They spent most of their lives online, Jesse said, gaming, trawling for music, downloading free software."

Thus began what turns into a very personal, in fact endearing, relationship between the author and his "subject." Katz visits the guys in Idaho, hangs out in their apartment (cave), observes their days and lives. He is unable to keep his journalistic distance, however, and begins to guide them in making changes in their lives. Although at first this seems like an infraction on Katz' part, he is up-front with the reader about his rather fairy godfather-like hand in Jesse and Eric's subsequent journey to Chicago and role in their struggle to get into college.

Geeks reads like a novel, I guess the joy of reading about a few geeks. There are moments

—Rustin
August 1998.

Letter from page 71

If you have a comment to make about this book, it will take you about five minutes to find Jon Katz' e-mail and start up a personal correspondence with him. I was shocked by this discovery. How simple. How revolutionary. Society knows that we are teetering on the edge of a new universe, but no one yet knows how big or small it really is. We get turned around by our old-fashioned legal structure, our general fear of change, our apathy. We are left behind by the rapid multitude of changes. See what Shawn Fanning did with his website Napster. And all the hackers out there who work twenty-four hours a day undermining The System and creating a new one. It's exciting. But until we work out the snarls that our geeks are creating—or rather, understand them as the complicated, ever-changing structures that they are—we as a society will continue to be afraid of them, and they will continue to work in a world apart.

What is being a geek all about? Anarchy. Pure and simple. It's not throwing spherical bombs and w

I work on a help desk for a big ISP and I get the greatest glee telling folks that what they read, what they

—Ken.

Letter from page 97

This book is about paradoxes. Simultaneous connection and removal. Alienation

Writings by Jon Katz:

Jon Katz writes for Slashdot: News for Nerds. Stuff That Matters.

<http://slashdot.org/>

Jon Katz articles on Hotwired.

http://search.hotwired.com/search97/s97.vts?Action=FilterSearch&Filter=docs_filter.fts∓ResultTemplate=news.fts&Collection=news&QueryMode=Internet&Query=%22jon%20katz%22

"Introducing Geek Screens" by Jon Katz.

<http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,12686,00.html>

Jon Katz writes for the Freedom Forum's site.

<http://www.freedomforum.org/>

Excerpt of Geeks.

<http://www.zdnet.com/anchordesk/stories/story/0,10738,2434426,00.html>

Mentioned in the book:

"ICQ ("I Seek You") is a user-friendly Internet program that notifies you which of your friends and associates are online and enables you to contact them."

<http://web.icq.com/>

Other book reviews:

Book review on The Scene Online

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<http://www.valleyscene.com/book0600.html>

<http://www.zonezero.com/magazine/articles/nell/geeks.html>