

# **Confessions of a criminal**

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2001

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When I was eleven years old and got Commodore 64, I quickly got hundreds of illegal pirate games from my friends. In a charter tour to Malta with parents I bought several cheap pirate tapes. Years later when I took a ferry to Tallinn I did not miss pirate product supply of the Mustamäki market. And every single program in any computer I have had has been installed illegally by my friend who works in a computer magazine. What a twisted person I have become.

But that is hardly surprising, taking into account my upbringing. In that same Malta trip my parents bought a video cassette, which they for sure knew was a pirate. And when we travelled to Turkey, they bought a whole stack of fraud Lacoste t-shirts, since they were almost free in comparison to any T-shirts sold in Finland, with label or without. And just a couple of years ago our family friend from Russia gave my parents several pirate CD-ROMs, and even installed them to their computer. I hope at least church had something to say about this moral decadence.

In January 2001 Helsingin Sanomat wrote that EU office on competition is certain that record companies have a cartel on CD-prices in Europe. CD's in Europe are 25% more expensive than those in US, where a cartel is suspected as well. I just wonder how much a normal CD would cost, if record companies had to compete with the same rules as bus companies in the capital area? Whatever, Helsingin Sanomat wrote only once about cartel of the record companies. But at least once a month it writes hyperbola about production, selling, smuggling or buying of pirate CD's, although seldom it has something else to report except some new custom statistics. Lately a new concern on pirate products has appeared in articles – they are getting almost as good as the original ones.

## **On branded clothes**

There exist piratism which one should condemn, such as production of low-quality spare parts to aeroplanes, cars and so on. But losses of record companies, computer, toy and sports clothes industry? Oh my god! When Helsingin Sanomat wrote 1997 a whole page article on piratism, they interviewed not one but two “specialists” from Nike-Finland. But when Finnish Nike-boycott campaign tried 1999 to have at least one representative of Finnish Nike to comment production conditions in Nike's factories, campaign was told that only one person in Europe is capable of answering to such questions! And international toy corporations are not doing any better than sports clothes industry. Factories of corporations like Mattell and Disney are all located in South, and one may find plenty of materials about them from the WebPages of Corporate Watch ([www.corpwatch.org](http://www.corpwatch.org)).

But are pirate factories any better? In average, for sure not. But in any sources of the anti-pirate crusaders I have not seen any such deficiencies listed, which one could not find in the very factories which produce the same clothes legally. At worst it is about difference between honest and hypocrite bastard. But not always, one friend of mine who visited Vietnam told that in small shops very cheap copies of Nike shoes were sold, these were produced by Nike sweatshop workers from pieces stolen during working hours. The quality was same as the original with exception of the glue which was worse, since workers did not managed to steal it from the factory.

## **On IT-giants**

I suppose Microsoft is pissed with rivals who do not invest to product development, since they have used any means to crush any development besides inside the corporation. One of the reasons why Microsoft was originally sentenced for the monopolisation were the deficits of Windows 98 (such as crashes and susceptibility to viruses), only reasons of which was attempted incompatibility with rivals. And smaller companies are not a lot better. Developer of Netscape Navigator, a browser which for a while seriously competed with Microsoft did not get a pence from the windfall profits of his program, since he was on a monthly salary when doing the development work. In general workers in computer industry are not doing at all that well as it is usually supposed. One may read a lot about less exposed sides of the Silicon Valley, such as union busting, withholding of wages, conditions in microchip conveyors and keeping “technological immigrants” as a cheap labour force with visa regulations one may read from the WebPages of Washington Alliance of Technology Workers (Wash-Tech), [www.washtec.org](http://www.washtec.org). There one may read which kind of bosses want to earn some extra by depriving East European universities and other poor institutions only realistic possibility to obtain computer programs.

## **On organised crime**

But aren't people buying pirate products supporting organised crime? That may happen. But it is just as likely to happen when one buys licensed records or videotapes. CBS, RCA, Capitol-EMI, MCA, Polygram and Warner all have Mafia connections (read more for example from book on history of Mafia by Ilkka Ahtokivi). Actually many blockbusters have been directly produced by a company owned by Colombo Mafia family. And in the same time one finds hyperbola in journals and in WebPages of all kinds of defenders of immaterial “rights” how usual burning pirate CD's for sale in usual Finnish homes (some suspended prison sentences have been given for that), not to talk about passing songs downloaded from net to friends. Such a production is for sure much less connected with the organised crime than licensed record industry.

## **On artists and consumer protection**

Claim of record companies that those suffering most of all from piracy are artists is anything but true. Most income of artists comes from license payments of radios, bigger stars also earn by concerts. Share of record sales is few percents of their income. Records are important for artists mainly to promote concerts. And record companies are pissing money from them any way they just may imagine. In November 2000 US congress approved a law, which finished the practice according to which artists got the rights of their gramex-tapes back 35 years after the recording. Many musicians who testified in the Napster court case announced after this that they have been cheated. [www-journal](http://www-journal.org) of Finnish Union of Musicians ([www.music-finland.com/sml/muusikko/muusikko\\_2000/8\\_kieroilu.html](http://www.music-finland.com/sml/muusikko/muusikko_2000/8_kieroilu.html)) writes:

“It might be difficult to get artists or bands to testify for record companies in court cases against pirates such as Napster in the future. It easily hurts public image of artist, if he defends rights which he does not own. Who would like to seem like an idiot?”

Of course one may claim that even small money is money, judging from how angry some artists get when talking about pirates. But what right do they have to freak out? Most have become stars with completely other talents than the musical ones. Actually many of them are really lousy singers and players, such as Klamydia, Finnish mainstream punk band most vocal about piracy. The fact that stupid people pay is the only reason of their enormous incomes, so why should they cry when people are not stupid enough to pay too much? Let russkies eat bread of Klamydia to the very last bit!

Because transnational corporations know that in average people seldom condemn piracy, they are desperate enough to move even economical arguments, claiming that consumers are always doing a bad trade when buying pirate products. For sure people often act against their long-term interest, but few people make the same bad trade twice. If one once paid a lousy pirate product, it is unlikely that she/he buys similar bad products again. But the fact that many people buy pirates again and again sign that people are content with the price/quality ratio of the pirate products. People are not completely dumb, although transnational corporations which have nothing else to sell except their brands so imagine.

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