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THE BOOKWORM

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The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
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the bookworm

by Peter H. Salus

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While I was at LISA in Philadelphia, Rob Kolstad asked me what I might suggest as a good system administration textbook. I told him I had no idea, but that I'd think about it.

I then realized that I'd received a large number of sysadmin books over the past year, and that I might as well put much of the material together here.

Oldies

Over the years, I've had two standbys: Frisch and Nemeth et al. Now there are two Nemeths: UNIX and Linux. At the same time, Aileen Frisch has come out with a new edition.

Nemeth et al., 3d edition (in royal purple) may be my favorite sysadmin book. Period. As Eric Allman has said, "This is not a nice, neat book." We don't live in a nice neat world, after all. Frisch's 3d edition comes in a close second. It now weighs in at over 1100 pages. I keep both of these on hand: I look things up in them and consider them irreplaceable.

But this doesn't answer Rob's query: I certainly wouldn't use either of these as a textbook for a course.

New Creations

There are three new books to consider, each of them looking like a textbook, with exercises after each chapter. At the most elementary end of the scale is Dave Taylor's *Teach Yourself...* volume. I don't think you can learn to be a sysadmin in 24 hours, but you can learn a

great deal. And this book is really right for someone who's got no previous experience as an administrator. If you're running Linux, Solaris, MacOS X on a desktop or a laptop, this book will suit you. If you're in a commercial environment, it's not enough. Limited, but quite good.

Limoncelli and Hogan is a truly outstanding book. I wrote about it last year, and this issue of *login*: carries a full review by Robert D. Haskins.

Freeland and McKay is the "highest" level among these books. I see it as focused on the needs of the in-service administrator. They offer all sorts of advice and don't worry too much about any individual system. I liked the detailed explanations of many topics. And these are high-level elucidations, not the simpler ones you'll find in Taylor.

Rob, here's your answer: If you need a textbook, I'd go with Limoncelli and Hogan for the basic course, Freeland and McKay for the advanced course.

Frisch and Nemeth are the standby references.

Linux

Nemeth et al. is the overall winner for Linux administration: It's intelligent, full of insights, and looks at the implementation of concepts. My copy lives at home, where I run Linux on my desktop and on my laptop.

Linux Security

I was critical of parts of Bob Toxen's book two years ago (Feb. 2001). The new 2d edition is an improvement on what was a good book. I've gradually become more and more interested in security issues, and this is an excellent piece of work on hardening a Linux system. The CD-ROM contains both a bunch of open source tools as well as a number written by Toxen.

BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS COLUMN

ESSENTIAL SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION, 3D ED.

AILEEN FRISCH

Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2002. Pp. 1149. ISBN 0596003439.

TEACH YOURSELF UNIX SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION IN 24 HOURS

DAVE TAYLOR

Indianapolis, IN: SAMS, 2002. Pp. 528. ISBN 0672323982.

THE PRACTICE OF SYSTEM AND NETWORK ADMINISTRATION

TOM LIMONCELLI & CHRISTINE HOGAN

Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2001. Pp. 776. ISBN 0201702711.

THE COMPLETE SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR

CURT FREELAND & DWIGHT MCKAY

Lawrenceville, NJ: Delmar Learning, 2002. Pp. 880. ISBN 0766835197.

LINUX ADMINISTRATION HANDBOOK

EVI NEMETH ET AL.

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002. Pp. 928. ISBN 0130084662.

REAL WORLD LINUX SECURITY, 2D ED.

BOB TOXEN

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002. Pp. 848 + CD-ROM. ISBN 0130464562.

BACKUPS AND RECOVERY

W. CURTIS PRESTON AND HAL SKELLY

Berkeley, CA: SAGE - The System Administrators Guild, 2002. Pp 72. ISBN 1-931971-02-1

DESIGNING SYSTEMS FOR INTERNET COMMERCE, 2D ED.

G. WINFIELD TREESE & LAWRENCE C. STEWART

Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2002. Pp. 496. ISBN 0201760355.

PROGRAMMING IN THE .NET ENVIRONMENT

DAMIAN WATKINS ET AL.

Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2002. Pp. 560. ISBN 0201770180.

Backups

I have a love-hate relationship with backups. I hate doing them, I hate storing them, and I really rely on them on the (rare) occasion when a recovery is needed.

Preston and Skelly have written a neat 72 pages in the SAGE "Short Topics" series. If you're reading this, you deal with information. If you deal with information, you need to store it and be able to recover it. My only cavil is that all the references are to URLs. Surely, there are some printed works that might have been cited.

Commerce

I liked the first edition of Treese and Stewart five years ago. The new edition is nearly 100 pages thicker, but worth-

while. The (new) sections on XML, content provision, and Web services are very good, indeed.

Humor?

When I received Watkins et al., I thought it was a joke. After I began reading it, I realized it was a farce – perhaps a tragic-comedy. If you think that Microsoft is poised to take over the universe, this may serve as a piece of the road map. Outside of an appendix on an aborted version of Perl, there's no language that I use listed. Those of you who know VB or C# or Oberon may find this book useful. As I find the notion of programming in the .NET environment ludicrous, I consider this book less than worthless. The perfect gift for the Microsoft sycophant.

Sorry.

[See also p. 41 for two additional reviews by Robert Haskins - ed.]

USENIX and SAGE Need You

People often ask how they can contribute to our organizations. Here is a list of tasks for which we hope to find volunteers (some contributions not only reap the rewards of fame and the good feeling of having helped the community, but authors also receive a small honorarium). Each issue we hope to have a list of openings and opportunities.

The SAGEwire and SAGEweb staff are seeking:

- Interview candidates
- Short article contributors (see <http://sagewire.sage.org>)
- White paper contributors for topics like these:

Back-ups	Emerging technology	Privacy
Career development	User education/training	Product round-ups
Certification	Ethics	SAGEwire
Consulting	Great new products	Scaling
Culture	Group tools	Scripting
Databases	Networking	Security implementation
Displays	New challenges	Standards
E-mail	Performance analysis	Storage
Education	Politics and the sysadm	Tools, system
- Local user groups: If you have a local user group affiliated with USENIX or SAGE, please mail the particulars to kolstad@sage.org so they can be posted on the Web site.

;login: always needs conference summarizers for USENIX conferences. Contact Alain Hénon, ah@usenix.org, if you'd like to help.