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PETER SALUS:  
THE BOOKWORM



**USENIX & SAGE**

The Advanced Computing Systems Association &  
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# the bookworm

## BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS COLUMN

### EMBRACING INSANITY: OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

RUSSELL C. PAVLICEK

Indianapolis, IN: SAMS, 2000. Pp. 177.  
ISBN 0-672-31989-6.

### INSTALL, CONFIGURE, AND CUSTOMIZE SLACKWARE LINUX

JOE BROCKMEIER ET AL.

Roseville, CA: Prisma Tech, 2000.  
Pp. 446+CD-ROM. ISBN 0-7615-2616-1.

### THINK UNIX

JON LASSER

n.p.: Que, 2000. Pp. 291. ISBN 0-7897-2376-X.

### RETHINKING PUBLIC KEY INFRASTRUCTURES AND DIGITAL CERTIFICATES

STEFAN A. BRANDS

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. Pp. 314.  
ISBN 0-262-02491-8.

### REAL WORLD LINUX SECURITY

BOB TOXEN

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.  
Pp. 700+CD-ROM. ISBN 0-13-028187-5.

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS

CLIVE TOMLINSON

Harlow, Essex, UK: Addison-Wesley, 2000.  
Pp. 317. ISBN 0-201-67473-4.

#### by Peter H. Salus

Peter H. Salus is a member of the ACM, the Early English Text Society, and the Trollope Society, and is a life member of the American Oriental Society. He is Editorial Director at Matrix.net. He owns neither a dog nor a cat.



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One of the problems of reading a lot is that you end up carping a lot. I pack a bunch of books to go (for example) to Atlanta for a few days, and I get fed up with them, and read something else, or actually get distracted by other books.

So, I flew to Atlanta from Austin. The first day at the ALS, Russell Pavlicek gave me a copy of his *Embracing Insanity*. The next day, Zonker (=Joe Brockmeier) gave me his book on Slackware Linux. Each was better than the volumes I had begun en route.

#### Open Stuff

*Embracing Insanity* is a first-rate book on open source development. If you're reading this, you most likely don't need it; but your manager or someone like your manager most likely does.

I get questions, serious questions, as to how anyone can actually "make money" out of open source (usually referred to as "free software") at least three or four times a week. Along with that comes a query as to why anyone would work on stuff and "just give it away."

The second question is easy for me to answer: while some may not get paid directly for writing the software, they get rewarded in a wonderful way: by their peers. Readers of my 20 or 30 years ago pieces will know that Mike Lesk wrote uucp; that Bill Joy wrote vi; that Linus Torvalds, Miguel de Icaza, Larry Wall all wrote stuff we use. The authors aren't a

part of a great anonymous turb in Redmond, WA.

Dollars are different from kudos and recognition.

Pavlicek does a great job. In well under 200 pages he makes the movement comprehensible and understandable.

*Install, Configure, and Customize Slackware Linux* is a very different sort of book. Mount the CD-ROM, read a few pages, and you're off.

I don't run Slackware. I'm writing this on a Dell running Red Hat 7.0. But each chapter in this book is by a real expert. Brian Proffitt's chapter 3 (on installing Slackware) is quite fine. Jacek Artymiak's on configuring X is very good. William Schaffer's on compiling the kernel ("kernel" on p. 199) is splendid. I consider Zonker's own Appendix A ("Linux Primer") a brilliant 45-page introduction.

#### Beginning UNIX

Lasser's small book is a different sort of introduction. It is an attempt at demystifying UNIX for those who have been computer users for years and who are convinced that UNIX is both difficult and (to use Steve Jobs' phrase) "user hostile."

Lasser has introduced UNIX through its philosophy, leading the reader through a set of problem-solving basics. As most of the job candidates I interview have lots of skills, but typically don't have UNIX experience, I believe that Lasser's book will come in very handy. I intend to order a half-dozen copies for my next set of recruits. You'll find it useful, too.

## Tough Stuff

Privacy and encryption are important topics. My review of Schneier last November should have made my thoughts clear.

If you also take this stuff seriously, and are willing to try to dredge up your unused algebra, Brands' book is for you. Brands' first 40 and final 14 pages are really interesting; the intervening 215 are really tough. I admit to "reading in" Brand for five weeks.

But I now comprehend the building blocks which underly digital certificates and public keys. Or at least, I understand them as well as a non-professional mathematician or cryptographer is going to.

(Most likely friends like Matt Bishop and Dan Geer will laugh at this, recognizing how little I actually know.)

I found Brands tough slogging yet very rewarding.

## Safe Linux

By and large, I found Bob Toxen's book very good. It is the first really full treatment of Linux security. But therein lies one of its flaws: it's very long. Over 700 pages. Nearly 100 of them made up of appendices. But it's solid; and the topic is an important one. (Perhaps I've said that too often.)

Toxen has organized the tome well, and he writes well enough that I wasn't in agony at any time. The 20 pages of Chapter 5 ("Common Attacks"); Chapters 10 and 11 ("Case Studies" and "Recent Break-ins"); and the 40 pages on Intrusion Detection (Part III) are exceptionally fine.

The appendix on references is good, but confusingly organized. Too many non-Prentice-Hall books (especially those published by Addison-Wesley and O'Reilly) are missing.

## Telcos and Their Friends

Tomlinson's brief volume is the perfect introduction to telecommunications for the non-techie parts of your company. I found it enjoyable, but a bit light. The bibliography omits far more than it includes. The list of acronyms is remarkable.

## Book Reviewers Needed

*login*: (more specifically, Peter Salus) is looking for reviewers for books that deserve greater coverage than can be afforded within the Bookworm format. If you are interested, contact <[peter@matrix.net](mailto:peter@matrix.net)>; feel free to suggest what topics you are interested in, and which book or books you might like to review.