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THE BOOKWORM



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The Advanced Computing Systems Association &
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the bookworm

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Well, it may not be the end of the year yet, but I know that the new edition of *Building Internet Firewalls* will make my top-ten list!

In the five years since the first edition of Chapman & Zwicky, *Firewalls* has picked up an author (Simon Cooper) and added about 350 pages. It's a good deal heftier than it was, but it's really packed with useful information.

If you're at all concerned with security, firewalls are a necessity. And this book is a must read.

I don't intend to go through every chapter, or even most chapters, here, but I do want to point out some exceptional aspects of Zwicky-Cooper-Chapman. Not at all least among these are the appendices: three of them, comprising over 50 pages. First, a truly superb list of resources – Web pages, FTP sites, mailing lists, papers, articles, books, etc. Second, tools and packages with complete URLs. Third, a (very) brief general essay on cryptography (with a pointer to Bruce Schneier's excellent *Applied Cryptography*).

I found chapters 10, 11, and 12 (on Bastion Hosts) very interesting. It's a topic I'd never thought about. Zwicky, Cooper, and Chapman have made the exposition lucid, and by covering (as they do in many places) UNIX/Linux and Windows (NT and 2000).

Also notable is chapter 14 on intermediary protocols. As most of you know, I'm addicted to RFCs and protocols. Reading the expositions here was genuinely illuminating.

You might even copy the 25 pages of Chapter 1 for your CIO or VP: it's clear and concise enough for him/her to understand.

This is an important and worthwhile book. Thanks, Elizabeth, Simon, and Brent.

Punditry

Another important book, for a different reason, is Metcalfe's anthology of *InfoWorld* columns. But Metcalfe, while egocentric, infuriating, brash, and irritating, is also interesting, entertaining, and (frequently) authoritative. As the essays are short, this is the perfect book to take on vacation or on a plane trip. You will surely snort occasionally; you'll guffaw sometimes, and you'll find that you even agree now and then. The most important thing is, however, that you recognize that a lot of the time Metcalfe is provocative yet right.

Microsoft was abusing its monopoly in 1991. The Internet did not collapse in 1996. Those are two examples.

Bob Metcalfe is an egotistic gasbag. Read him!

Useful Stuff

If you live on the Internet, you know that there are problems. Yes, we've got trouble right here in River City! The result of this is that books that offer solutions to real-world problems are of great value.

Two such books that have come my way in the last few months are Petersen's *Unix Networking Clearly Explained* and Ward's *Linux Problem Solver*.

Petersen really knows his stuff, and it shows. It shows most significantly in his breadth. He talks about mail, and then there are chapters on mailx, Elm, MH,

BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS COLUMN

BUILDING INTERNET FIREWALLS, 2ND ED.

ELIZABETH ZWICKY, SIMON COOPER & D. BRENT CHAPMAN

Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2000. Pp. 869.
ISBN 1-56592-871-7.

INTERNET COLLAPSES AND OTHER INFOWORLD PUNDITRY

BOB METCALFE

Foster City, CA: IDG Books, 2000. Pp. 324.
ISBN 0-7645-3503-X.

ENIAC

SCOTT MCCARTNEY

New York: Walker & Co., 1999. Pp. 262.
ISBN 0-8027-1348-3.

UNIX NETWORKING CLEARLY EXPLAINED

RICHARD L. PETERSEN

San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann, 1999.
Pp. 591. ISBN 0-12-552145-6.

THE LINUX PROBLEM SOLVER

BRIAN WARD

San Francisco, CA: No Starch Press, 2000.
Pp. 283 + CR-ROM. ISBN 1-886411-35-2.

ESSENTIAL XML

DON BOX, AARON SKONNARD & JOHN LAM

Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2000.
Pp. 368. ISBN 1-201-70914-7.

and Pine. Where news is concerned, rn, readnews, trn, tin, and nn are all there. And archie, WAIS, Gopher, Veronica are discussed along with WWW.

There's a lot more, but I was really pleased to see that stuff that's more than a few years old, but still in use, has not been totally forgotten. I still like Lynx, for example; I'm frequently uninterested in the zillions of bits of graphics.

Ward is useful for a very different reason: there are over 100 books on installing some flavor of Linux and getting started, but there's too little on what you do next – what you do when there's a real problem with your network or you've suffered a system crash.

Ward answers the questions you'll have in real life, after your Linux system is up and running. The CD is useful, too, as it contains a bunch of config files and can serve as an emergency boot disk.

Petersen and Ward share the shortcoming of not have a references section, neither of URLs nor of books.

XML

Box et al. have written a book that's not so much about the Web, as about how XML can be utilized as “universal duct tape for all software integration problems.” I'm not really convinced as to XML's universality, but I have been sold on its usefulness for several years.

This is a fine book on a relatively high level, covering a number of fundamental abstractions and the concepts that underlie XML technology.

The three appendices cover the XML information set (complete with URLs), XML productions (both xml and xmlns), and an “example gallery” – all in under 100 pages.

Highly recommended.