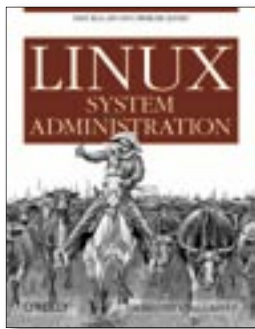# BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES PYLES

Linux System Administration

Linux System Administration seems to have been written for Linux sys admins who already know the basics and need to have a central location to find solutions to the most common problems. Don't expect chapters about basic tasks that the experienced Linux sys admin already understands.

Chapter 1 was what I would expect out of a Preface or Introduction. In Chapter 2, the authors used Debian, which pleased me no end, and then the installation was not the typical base system. If you want a quickie guide to installing a multifunctional server system on Debian, this chapter takes you through all the steps. If you are running a small business and need to have a single server providing DNS, MySQL mail, web, and ftp services on the network, read through Chapter 2 and you've got it all set up.

In Chapter 3, the focus becomes more on individual services, starting with DNS. After blowing through DNS and BIND basics, you are taken through the setup, finding domains, answering queries, testing lookups, troubleshooting BIND, and so on. Each subsequent chapter follows the same format, starting with installation and proceeding to configuration and administration with a variety of specific methods. One nice chapter covered virtualization, which is all the rage in the enterprise environment these days. It was fairly brief but did cover both Xen and VMware. I'd like to see the virtualization chapter expanded.

Although I really appreciated all of the real-life examples of administrative tasks the book contains, I didn't see a lot of troubleshooting tips.

The blurb on the cover said "Solve Real-Life Linux Problems Quickly," but I don't consider common administration tasks "problems" and would have liked to see more troubleshooting tutorials included. That said, I can see how *Linux System Administration* can be a quick reference for some tasks, such as how to set up load balancing quickly, set up a LAMP server, or add encryption to mail services.

Tom Adelstein and Bill Lubanovic
Paperback
291 pages
O'Reilly, 2007
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ISBN-13: 978-0596009526 UK
£ 22.89, US$ 44.99, EUR 33.63

The Linux Programmer's Toolbox

Finally, a single source that contains everything the Linux programmer needs to know. John Fusco's *The Linux Programmer's Toolbox* helps you concentrate on programming rather than searching.
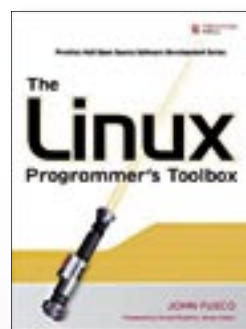
Fusco intended this book for the intermediate to advanced programmer, but according to the Foreword, a proficient C or C++ programmer could make very good use of the information between these covers. The term "intermediate to advanced" doesn't apply to the reader's experience with Linux. For example, Chapter 1 includes some very elementary examples of file permissions and tar-extraction command syntax.

If you are already a Linux guru, you can skip significant portions of the book. In fact, the book was written so that all or most of the chapters can stand alone.

However, if you are a programmer moving to Linux from another platform, you'll really appreciate the introductory information on working with Linux.

The real draw for people like .Net programmers picking up this book is that Linux/Unix has a huge library of tools available, and although many are decades old, they are solid, reliable, and highly specialized. Also, in the Windows world, the kernel by and large is a black box. Chapter 5, "What Every Developer Should Know about the Kernel," should be enough to impress even the most stoic programmer.

You don't have to be a programmer to get something out of Fusco's text. For example, Chapter 9, "Performance Tuning," presents a first-rate treatment of performance tuning that any sys admin can appreciate.

For the experienced programmer who's a Linux newbie, I'd recommend picking up some introductory material about working with shell commands. Beyond that small caveat, grab a copy of *The Linux Programmer's Toolbox* and enjoy.

John Fusco Paperback
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Building a Monitoring Infrastructure with Nagios

Josephson's sense of humor shows in various parts of the book, but mainly, this book is a well-written professional guide to using Nagios for enterprise-level network monitoring.

Although written for network engineers and sys admins, it is an easy read with a minimum of geekisms and a great deal of experience and common sense. It also seems as much an advertisement for Nagios itself as it is documentation for this software.

When I say that this book is an easy read, that's within the context of being familiar with networking protocols, the bash (or whatever your prefer) shell, some C and Perl programming, and a bit of Unix/Linux shell scripting. Although Nagios will run on Windows, it is designed to run on a Linux platform, so that's the "language" the book is written in. If you are new to networking in general and anticipate the day when you'll take the exam for CompTIA's Network + certification, you might want to wait a bit before buying this book. Getting your hands dirty running Linux systems for a while would also be a good idea.

I've reviewed quite a number of books that tout themselves as written for the intermediate to advanced professional in the IT field but that have also started out at ground zero describing what TCP/IP is and how to ping a remote host. Thankfully, Josephson's book isn't among that collection – 264 pages is quite sufficient to present Nagios to the networking professional who is presumed to already know his or her business and does not need a refresher course in TCP/IP 101.

As the Senior Systems Engineer for DBG, Inc., Josephson obviously is a veteran, daily Nagios user. Certainly, he has written this book from that perspective. Chapter 8 alone is worth the cover price, describing "wielding" the Nagios Event Broker to the 2.0 kernel version of this software. Of course, you'll have to brush up on your C programming to make use of this option (the majority of code samples in the rest of the book are either Perl or Unix script).

Josephson has definitely written a "pint-sized powerhouse" in *Building a Monitoring Infrastructure with Nagios*.

If you are responsible for monitoring a medium-to enterprise-size network infrastructure and are considering moving from a large, expensive commercial product to Nagios, this book is right for you.
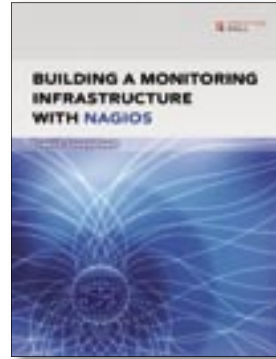
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