inside:

THE BOOKWORM

the bookworm

by Peter H. Salus

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My "Top 10" list for 2000 is at the end of this column.

Third Time Around

As you faithful readers know, I generally avoid mentioning second (third, nth) editions. But last time there was the *Firewalls* book and now there's a third edition of the *UNIX System Administration Handbook*. Evi Nemeth and her collaborators have done the truly splendid job I've come to expect of them. In 1988 and in 1994 I saluted the "red book."

The third edition has turned purple. It has also added full coverage for Red Hat Linux. And covers IPv6. The first edition had a foreword by Dennis Ritchie. The second reprinted that, plus one by Kirk McKusick and Eric Allman. This edition reprints both of those *plus* one by Linus Torvalds. It's been the best book in the field for a dozen years.

Run out and buy your copy now!

History

In August 1998, the International Conference on the History of Computing was held at the Heinz Nixdorf Museums Forum in Paderborn, Germany. *The First Computers* contains two dozen papers, all but one presented in some form at the conference. They have all been extensively rewritten, and a superb introductory chapter by Michael R. Williams has been prefixed to them. The editors, Raul Rojas and Ulf Hashagen, have added an informative preface.

The questions surrounding first computers as a concept are manifold. Reading this volume makes it clear that computer science arose simultaneously in several places. (Think of Priestley and Lavoisier in chemistry, or Darwin and Wallace in biology, or Newton and Leibniz in mathematics.)

This book outlines the trains of thought where computer architectures are concerned and where the various developments in the US, in Germany, and in Britain were concerned. The photos and diagrams are just wonderful. MIT Press has executed the production quite lovingly.

If there's any lack, it's still George Stibitz. Though his name appears in the table on p. 10, there's no essay on him nor his work at Bell Labs in the 1930s and 1940s.

Style

Another interesting and handsome volume is *Beautiful Corporations*. I hadn't been giving much thought to the manner in which companies construct a strong identity for themselves and their customers. Yet this is obviously the major function of marketing and PR firms. (I generally think of graphic design only in a Tufte sense.)

Dickinson and Svensen have really gotten me thinking about the driving force in our capitalist culture. Even if it isn't computing, it's important.

Marking It Up

SGML and HTML are giving way to XML. Box et al., which I reviewed last time, try to tell us that the Extensible Markup Language has turned into "universal duct tape" for software applications. Box, Skonnard, and Lam enabled me to acquire a genuine understanding of the inner workings of XML, as they present it. But they present it from a singularly slanted point of view. They see

XML as replacing Java and lots of other stuff. I'm not certain that I buy this Redmond point of view, yet. Box et al. reprint the latest W3C draft, which they state is "hopelessly out of date." Not to me.

A really splendid, but brief, version of XML's true abilities and purpose can be found in Eckstein's *XML Pocket Reference*. A part of O'Reilly's continuing pocket-sized series, the *XML Pocket Reference* is all that and much more. It introduces XML, gives a good intro to the definitions, and sits next to this workstation as I type. It's a gem!

In a different way, Bradley has given me a real insight into the way that XSL (Extensible Stylesheet Language) works. In fact, he also informed me about the limitations of the whole family of stylesheet standards.

I've recommended these two books to my Web crew.

The Year's Top Ten

I had a lot of trouble picking only ten books this year, and I ended up cheating, as #10 is a series. I guess I'll find coal in my shoe/stocking this year.

1. Zwicky, Chapman & Cooper, *Building Internet Firewalls* (O'Reilly)

2. Schneier, *Secrets and Lies* (Wiley)

3. Nemeth et al., *UNIX System Administration Handbook* (Prentice Hall PTR)

4. Callaghan, *NFS Illustrated* (Addison-Wesley)

5. Garfinkel, *Database Nation* (O'Reilly)

6. Smith, *[Incr Tcl] from the Ground Up* (Osborne/McGraw Hill)

7. Pawlan, *Essentials of the Java Programming Language* (Addison-Wesley)

8. Metcalfe, *Internet Collapses* (IDG Books)

9. Rojas & Hashagen, eds., *The First Computers* (MIT Press)

10. Loshin, ed., *Big Book of . . . RFCs* series (Morgan Kaufmann)