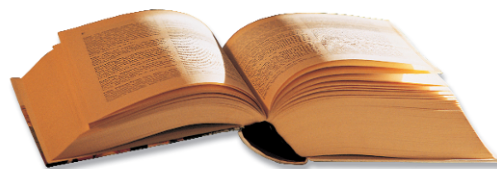# Book Reviews

A Practical Guide to Red Hat Linux: Fedora Core and Red Hat Enterprise Linux (2nd Edition)

Mark Sobell is one of my favorite authors. His "A Practical Guide to Linux" has remained on my bookshelf for many years and is still finding plenty of use. His latest book is along the same themes, but much more current. "A Practical Guide to Red Hat Linux" naturally focuses on both Fedora (Core 2) and Red Hat Enterprise Linux (version 3), but like previous guide to the Unix System, nearly all of the information can be carried over to other distributions.

This is not a book for late night reading. At 1200 pages this paperback is definitely a heavy tome. The weight alone should give an indication of the broad range of topics covered. Beginners are catered for, as the opening chapters describe some of the history including the GNU ideals, before going on to installation. The detail is as I have come to expect from Sobell, amazing. Along the way he gives references to where you can find more about each topic and subject.

Any intermediate reader will be delighted as he describes just about every tool and utility available on the accompanying 4 CDs, which include Fedora. Where differences do occur between Red Hat Enterprise and Fedora, the book shows both options so you can easily follow it as a tutorial.

The style and tone of the book keep it from being a dry dusty technical manual, and turn it into something readable. If you are unsure on an admin matter, then this will be the first book you reach for with all the topics you find yourself having to deal with on a regular basis such as: Samba, NIS, NFS, Apache, Firewalls with IPtables, DHCP, Scripting and updating.

Admins will be left with the question "Is it worth buying, or should I stick with the previous Sobell reference book?" The answer is simple. Buy this book. It is not just a rewrite of previous works. Sobell has been very busy and it is crammed with enough extra information to make this a good investment.

As usual the appendices and index do the book justice and help to explain any jargon that you may come across. Or do you know how much a sextillion is? ∎
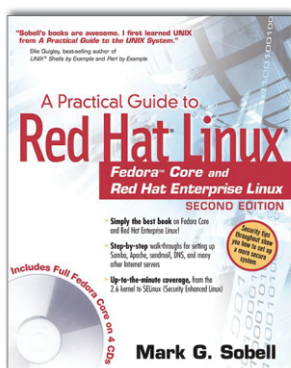
Mark G Sobell
1,136 pages
Prentice Hall Ptr, 0-13147-024-8
£39.99, US$ 49.99, EUR 45.90

Learning Red Hat Enterprise Linux and Fedora, 4th Edition

I like O'Reilly books. They are the standard that other publishers should aim for. Unfortunately, they are not all perfect. Maybe it is because this book was read at the same time as the Sobell book. Maybe it was because it costs $39.99 and is less than 350 pages, or that (because it is a few months old) it is already showing its age as it only has Core 1 coverage, although just about any text suffers from this problem of constant releases.

Either way, it is not in the same league in the information it gives, or value for money, compared to Sobell.

The book is, as to be expected, a good guide to Red Hat's distribution. It explains in enough detail for any novice to be able to set up and configure a Red Hat box and install packages with the RPM tools.

The subtitle of the book is "Deploying office productivity applications & software development environments". For this we can read – installing OpenOffice.org and Evolution for office tasks and using bash and nano for software development.

The book is clear and not patronizing as so often is the case for introduction and installation manuals. Little if any mention is made of RH Enterprise as the book focuses on Fedora. This is not too worrying for most admins who know that the two have only just split with little, if any divergence, but does seem a little harsh on those looking for RH Enterprise help who chance upon the book.

On the plus side, the book is easy to understand, with many screenshots, and will show any novice that Linux is straightforward and easy to use if you are methodical. No prior knowledge of Linux is assumed, but the reader is expected to have some usage of modern graphical computer systems. The chapter on Bash is useful in showing how simple commands can be scripted together to generate powerful functions, but all in all it is only a small taster of what is available.

Ideal for those who want to try Linux, but in such a saturated sector of publishing it is hard to see how O'Reilly can really make a mark with this book. ∎
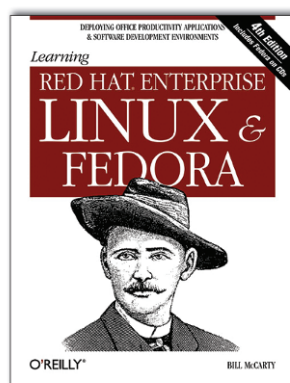
Bill McCarty
352 pages
O'Reilly, 0-596-00589-X
£28.50, US$ 39.99, EUR 37.50

WarDriving – Drive, Detect, Defend: A Guide to Wireless Security

WarDriving is not a crime. This is one of the main messages that the principle author of this book, Chris Hurley, is keen to put across. He should know, because he was there. Chris (aka Roamer) was behind the first DefCon WarDriving Contest in 2002 and was one of the guys behind the first World Wide WarDrive.

Is this a book for Linux users? Yes, and no. It provides a solid introduction to the subject of WarDriving, explaining the basic hardware requirements and going into detail on choosing and configuring wireless LAN cards, the various types of antenna, and the parts needed to connect the whole thing up to provide a workable WarDriving toolkit. It explains the need to avoid associating with other people's networks, or – heaven forbid – gatecrashing and exploiting other people's resources. It even tells you to keep to the speed limit while WarDriving.

Although this may come as a shock to some people, Linux is not the only major operating system on today's markets. The authors dabble with the arcane art of "Installing Wireless Cards and Programs on Windows"; definitely not the kind of thing that your average Linux geek will appreciate. Things heat up when they install wireless cards on Red Hat and Fedora, putting cards into monitor mode, and installing Kismet.

No book is perfect. I was left wondering who would type in the pages of Perl code when you can download similar off the Web. But the authors do have a homepage with updates that keep the book in line with constantly changing software releases.

Although the authors risk the wrath of the White Hats by devoting a chapter to attacking wireless networks, they more than compensate by going into detail on basic and advanced wireless security.

To my mind, the book really takes off when "Roamer" revisits his old haunts, explaining how everything started at DefCon 10, providing humorous insights for those who may not have heard of WarDriving. And in the end, it was those descriptions of the early days that convinced me that this was a good buy. ∎
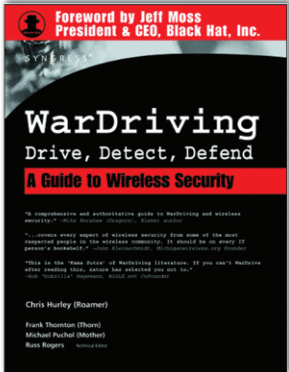
Chris Hurley, Frank Thornton, Michael Puchol
495 pages
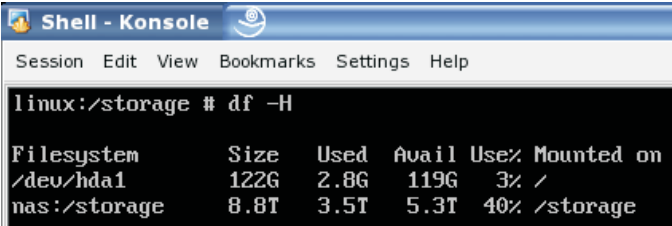**Syngress Media, 1-931836-03-5**
£33.95, US$ 49.95, EUR 46.90