BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computing and the Internet, 3rd Edition

I read the first edition of this book in the mid-1990s, well before the Internet boom, and much has changed in the world of computing since then. The new edition of *A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computing and the Internet* begins with an overview of modern computing, covering topics such as blogs, e-commerce, the Internet, tools for disabled users, robotics, and conceptual issues, such as "What Is Ethics, Anyway?"

Subsequent chapters cover popular topics such as privacy, freedom of speech, intellectual property, and crime. In the Privacy chapter, author Sara Baase discusses new risks involved with new technology, such as the thousands of databases that now hold our personal information, and how search engines save search phrases.

In following chapters, the author looks at issues related to using your computer at work, errors caused by and failures of computers, evaluating and "controlling" the technology, and professional ethics and responsibilities. Baase does not discuss the topics as if they are problems that need to be "fixed"; instead, she describes the issues surrounding the given topic and discusses various laws, court cases, and real-world examples.

A Gift of Fire is intended to be a text book, and each chapter concludes with various "exercises." A few exercises simply test your understanding of the material, and "assignments" encourage readers to research specific information related to the chapter. Finally, she proposes exercises meant for class discussion. Because of the nature of the material, this kind of critical thinking about the topics helps because many of the issues are not clear-cut, with multiple sides to the legal and ethical aspects.

Although the book cannot cover social, legal, and ethical issues for computing and the Internet, it does a wonderful job of covering the essentials while providing an interesting read for anyone who used computers.
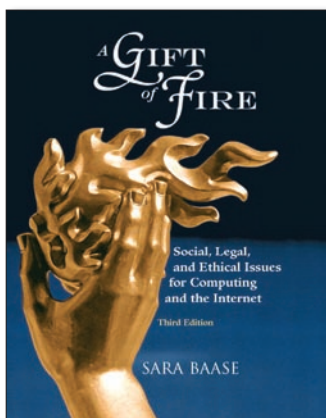
Sara Baase
Paperback, 528 Pages
Prentice Hall, 2008
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## Network Security Assessment, Second Edition

Two key characteristics set this book apart from others. First, the author never claims that following the steps he lays out will make your network secure or hacker-proof. Instead, his goal is to give you the tools to assess the security of your network.

Second, the book covers various tools, discussing what information each tool can provide and what this information means.

Starting with a discussion of what network security assessment entails, the author then moves on to an overview of tools, and each subsequent chapter digs deeper into the system – what machines are on the network, what services are being provided, and how to collect information about specific applications.

The chapter that discusses risks caused by improperly written applications might be a bit too basic for many admins – and probably most managers – so this can probably be skipped, particularly if you are not involved with software development in any way.

Next comes a chapter on the Nessus vulnerability scanner. Although entire books have been written about Nessus, I think this chapter provides a nice introduction and you might actually get more out of it because of the background in previous chapters.
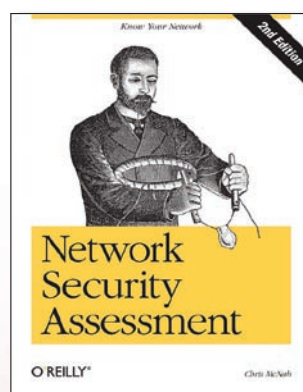
In a few places, the author was not clear about the security implications of the information collected, such as how it could be exploited. However, considering that Chris McNab did do a great job of efficiently covering vast amounts of information, I can easily overlook any ding I might want to give the book.

Chris McNab
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