Building
SECURE SERVERS
with
LINUX

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Whatever else you do to secure a Linux system, it must have comprehensive, accurate, and carefully watched logs. Logs serve several purposes. First, they help us troubleshoot virtually all kinds of system and application problems. Second, they provide valuable early-warning signs of system abuse. Third, after all else fails (whether that means a system crash or a system compromise), logs can provide us with crucial forensic data.

This chapter is about making sure your system processes and critical applications log the events and states you’re interested in and dealing with this data once it’s been logged. The two logging tools we’ll cover are syslog and the more powerful Syslog-ng (“syslog new generation”). In the monitoring arena, we’ll discuss Swatch (the Simple Watcher), a powerful Perl script that monitors logs in real time and takes action on specified events.

**syslog**

syslog is the tried-and-true workhorse of Unix logging utilities. It accepts log data from the kernel (by way of klogd), from any and all local process, and even from processes on remote systems. It’s flexible as well, allowing you to determine what gets logged and where it gets logged to.

A preconfigured syslog installation is part of the base operating system in virtually all variants of Unix and Linux. However, relatively few system administrators customize it to log the things that are important for their environment and disregard the things that aren’t. Since, as few would dispute, information overload is one of the major challenges of system administration, this is unfortunate. Therefore, we begin this chapter with a comprehensive discussion of how to customize and use syslog.

**Configuring syslog**

Whenever syslogd, the syslog daemon, receives a log message, it acts based on the message’s type (or “facility”) and its priority. syslog’s mapping of actions to facilities
and priorities is specified in `/etc/syslog.conf`. Each line in this file specifies one or more facility/priority selectors followed by an action; a selector consists of a facility or facilities and a (single) priority.

In the following `syslog.conf` line in Example 10-1, `mail.notice` is the selector and `/var/log/mail` is the action (i.e., “write messages to `/var/log/mail`”).

**Example 10-1. Sample syslog.conf line**

```
mail.notice /var/log/mail
```

Within the selector, `mail` is the facility (message category) and `notice` is the level of priority.

**Facilities**

Facilities are simply categories. Supported facilities in Linux are `auth`, `auth-priv`, `cron`, `daemon`, `kern`, `lpr`, `mail`, `mark`, `news`, `syslog`, `user`, `uucp`, and `local0` through `local7`. Some of these are self-explanatory, but the following are of special note:
**auth**
Used for many security events.

**auth-priv**
Used for access-control-related messages.

**daemon**
Used by system processes and other daemons.

**kern**
Used for kernel messages.

**mark**
Messages generated by `syslogd` itself, which contain only a timestamp and the string --MARK--; to specify how many minutes should transpire between marks, invoke `syslogd` with the -m [minutes] flag.

**user**
The default facility when none is specified by an application or in a selector.

**local7**
Boot messages.

* Wildcard signifying “any facility.”

**none**
Wildcard signifying “no facility.”

### Priorities

Unlike facilities, which have no relationship to each other, priorities are hierarchical. Possible priorities in Linux are (in increasing order of urgency): *debug, info, notice, warning, err, crit, alert,* and *emerg.* Note that the “urgency” of a given message is determined by the programmer who wrote it; facility and priority are set by the programs that generate messages, not by syslog.

As with facilities, the wildcards * and none may also be used. Only one priority or wildcard may be specified per selector. A priority may be preceded by either or both of the modifiers, = and !.

If you specify a single priority in a selector (without modifiers), you’re actually specifying that priority plus all higher priorities. Thus the selector `mail.notice` translates to “all mail-related messages having a priority of notice or higher,” i.e., having a priority of notice, warning, err, crit, alert, or emerg.

You can specify a single priority by prefixing a = to it. The selector `mail.=notice` translates to “all mail-related messages having a priority of notice.” Priorities may also be negated: `mail.!notice` is equivalent to “all mail messages except those with priority of notice or higher,” and `mail.!=notice` corresponds to “all mail messages except those with the priority notice.”
Actions

In practice, most log messages are written to files. If you list the full path to a filename as a line’s action in `syslog.conf`, messages that match that line will be appended to that file. (If the file doesn’t exist, syslog will create it.) In Example 10-1, we instructed syslog to send matched messages to the file `/var/log/mail`.

You can send messages other places too. An action can be a file, a named pipe, a device file, a remote host, or a user’s screen. Pipes are usually used for debugging. Device files that people use are usually TTYs. Some people also like to send security information to `/dev/lp0`—i.e., to a local line printer. Logs that have been printed out can’t be erased or altered by an intruder, but they also are subject to mechanical problems (paper jams, ink depletion, etc.) and are harder to parse if you need to find something in a hurry.

Remote logging is one of the most useful features of syslog. If you specify a hostname or IP address preceded by an `@` sign as a line’s action, messages that match that line will be sent to UDP port 514 on that remote host. For example, the line:

```
*.emerg            @mothership.mydomain.org
```

will send all messages with `emerg` priority to UDP port 514 on the host named `mothership.mydomain.org`. Note that the remote host’s (in this example, `mothership’s`) `syslogd` process will need to have been started with the `-r` flag for it to accept your log messages. By default, `syslogd` does not accept messages from remote systems.

syslog has no access-control mechanism of its own: if you enable the reception of remote messages with the `-r` flag, your host will accept messages on UDP port 514 from any and all remote computers. See the end of this section for some advice on how to mitigate this.

If you run a central log server, which I highly recommend, you’ll want to consider some sort of access controls on it for incoming messages. At the very least, you should consider `tcpwrappers`’ “hosts access” (source-IP-based) controls or maybe even local firewall rules (`ipchains or iptables`).

More sophisticated selectors

You can list multiple facilities separated by commas in a single `syslog.conf` selector. To extend Example 10-1 to include both mail and uucp messages (still with priority `notice` or higher), you could use this line (Example 10-2).

```
Example 10-2. Multiple facilities in a single selector

mail,uucp.notice   /var/log/mail
```

The same is not true of priorities. Remember that only one priority or priority wildcard may be specified in a single selector.
Stealth Logging

Lance Spitzner of the Honeynet Project (http://www.honeynet.org) suggests a trick that’s useful for honey (decoy) nets and maybe even for production DMZs: “stealth logging.” This trick allows a host connected to a hub or other shared medium to send its log files to a non-IP-addressed system that sees and captures the log messages but can’t be directly accessed over the network, making it much harder for an intruder on your network to tamper with log files.

The idea is simple: suppose you specify a bogus IP address in a syslog.conf action (i.e., an IP address that is legitimate for your host’s LAN but isn’t actually used by any host running syslogd). Since syslog messages are sent using the “connectionless” (one-way) UDP protocol, the sending host doesn’t expect any reply when it sends a log message.

Furthermore, assuming your DMZ hosts are connected to a shared medium such as a hub, any syslog messages sent over the network will be broadcast on the local LAN. Therefore, it isn’t necessary for a central log server on that LAN to have an IP address: the log server can passively “sniff” the log messages via snort, ethereal, or some other packet sniffer.

Obviously, since an IP-addressless stealth logger won’t be accessible via your usual IP-based remote administration tools, you’ll need console access to that host to view your logs. Alternatively, you can add a second network interface to the stealth logger, connecting it to a dedicated management network or directly to your management workstation via crossover cable.

In addition to configuring each DMZ host’s syslog.conf file to log to the bogus IP, you’ll also need a bogus ARP entry added to the network startup script on each sending host. If you don’t, each system will try in vain to learn the Ethernet address of the host with that IP, and it won’t send any log packets.

For example, if you want a given host to pretend to send packets to the bogus IP 192.168.192.168, then in addition to specifying @192.168.192.168 as the action on one or more lines in /etc/syslog.conf, you’ll need to enter this command from a shell prompt:

    arp -s 192.168.192.168 03:03:03:31:33:77

This is not necessary if you send log packets to a “normal” log host (e.g., if 192.168.192.168 is the IP address of a host running syslogd with the -r flag."

You may, however, specify multiple selectors separated by semicolons. When a line contains multiple selectors, they’re evaluated from left to right: you should list general selectors first, followed by more specific selectors. You can think of selectors as filters: a message is passed through the line from left to right, it passes first through coarse filters and then through more granular ones.

Continuing our one-line example, suppose we still want important mail and uucp messages to be logged to /var/log/mail, but we’d like to exclude uucp messages with priority alert. Our line then looks like Example 10-3.

---

You may, however, specify multiple selectors separated by semicolons. When a line contains multiple selectors, they’re evaluated from left to right: you should list general selectors first, followed by more specific selectors. You can think of selectors as filters: a message is passed through the line from left to right, it passes first through coarse filters and then through more granular ones.

Continuing our one-line example, suppose we still want important mail and uucp messages to be logged to /var/log/mail, but we’d like to exclude uucp messages with priority alert. Our line then looks like Example 10-3.
Actually, **syslogd**’s behavior isn’t as predictable as this may imply: listing selectors that contradict each other or that go from specific to general rather than vice versa can yield unexpected results. Therefore, it’s more accurate to say “for best results, list general selectors to the left and their exceptions (and/or more-specific selectors) to the right.”

Wherever possible, keep things simple. You can use the `logger` command to test your `syslog.conf` rules (see “Testing System Logging with logger” later in this chapter).

Note that in the second selector (`uucp.!=alert`), we used the prefix `!=` before the priority to signify “not equal to.” If we wanted to exclude uucp messages with priority `alert` and higher (i.e., `alert` and `emerg`), we could omit the `=` (see Example 10-4).

**Example 10-4. Selector list with a less specific exception**

```
mail,uucp.notice;uucp.!=alert    /var/log/mail
```

You might wonder what will happen to a uucp message of priority `info`: this matches the second selector, so it should be logged to `/var/log/mail`, right? Not based on the previous examples. Since the line’s first selector matches only mail and uucp messages of priority `notice` and higher, such a message wouldn’t be evaluated against the second selector.

There’s nothing to stop you from having a different line for dealing with `info`-level uucp messages, though. You can even have more than one line deal with these if you like. Unlike a firewall rule base, each log message is tested against all lines in `/etc/syslog.conf` and acted on as many times as it matches.

Suppose we want emergency messages broadcast to all logged-in users, as well as written to their respective application logs. We could use something like Example 10-5.

**Example 10-5. A sample syslog.conf file**

```
# Sample syslog.conf file that sorts messages by mail, kernel, and “other,”
# and broadcasts emergencies to all logged-in users

# print most sys. events to tty10 and to the xconsole pipe, and emergencies to everyone
kern.warn;*.err;authpriv.none    |/dev/xconsole
*.emerg                         *

# send mail, news (most), & kernel/firewall msgs to their respective logfiles
mail.*                           -/var/log/mail
kern.*                           -/var/log/kernel_n_firewall

# save the rest in one file
*.*:mail.none                    -/var/log/messages
```
Did you notice the - (minus) sign in front of the write-to-file actions? This tells syslogd not to synchronize the specified log file after writing a message that matches that line. Skipping synchronization decreases disk utilization and thus improves performance, but it also increases the chances of introducing inconsistencies, such as missing or incomplete log messages, into those files. Use the minus sign, therefore, only in lines that you expect to result in numerous or frequent file writes.

Besides performance optimization, Example 10-5 also contains some useful redundancy. Kernel warnings plus all messages of error-and-higher priority, except authpriv messages, are printed to the X-console window. All messages having priority of emergency and higher are too, in addition to being written to the screens of all logged-in users.

Furthermore, all mail messages and kernel messages are written to their respective log files. All messages of all priorities (except mail messages of any priority) are written to /var/log/messages.

Example 10-5 was adapted from the default syslog.conf that SuSE 7.1 put on one of my systems. But why shouldn’t such a default syslog.conf file be fine the way it is? Why change it at all?

Maybe you needn’t, but you probably should. In most cases, default syslog.conf files either:

- Assign to important messages at least one action that won’t effectively bring those messages to your attention (e.g., by sending messages to a TTY console on a system you only access via SSH)
- Handle at least one type of message with too much or too little redundancy to meet your needs

We’ll conclude our discussion of syslog.conf with Tables 10-1 through 10-4, which summarize syslog.conf’s allowed facilities, priorities, and types of actions. Note that numeric codes should not be used in syslog.conf on Linux systems. They are provided here strictly as a reference, should you need to configure a non-Linux syslog daemon that uses numeric codes (e.g., Cisco IOS), or to send syslog messages to your log server because they’re used internally (i.e., in raw syslog packets). You may see them referred to elsewhere.

Table 10-1. syslog.conf’s allowed facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Facility codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>auth</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auth-priv</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cron</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daemon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kern</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10-1. syslog.conf’s allowed facilities (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Facility codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lpr</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mark</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syslog</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>user</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uucp</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local(0-7)</td>
<td>16-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (&quot;any facility&quot;)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-2. syslog.conf’s priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities (in increasing order)</th>
<th>Priority codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debug</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>info</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>err</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crit</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alert</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emerg</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (&quot;any priority&quot;)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-3. Use of “!” and “=” as prefixes with priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*.notice (no prefix)</td>
<td>any event with priority of 'notice' or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*.!notice</td>
<td>no event with priority of 'notice' or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*.=notice</td>
<td>only events with priority 'notice'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*.!=notice</td>
<td>no events with priority of 'notice'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-4. Types of actions in syslog.conf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/some/file</td>
<td>Log to specified file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-/some/file</td>
<td>Log to specified file but don’t sync afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/some/pipe</td>
<td>Log to specified pipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/dev/some/tty_or_console</td>
<td>Log to specified console</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@remote.hostname.or.IP</td>
<td>Log to specified remote host</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Running syslogd

Just as the default syslog.conf may or may not meet your needs, the default startup mode of syslogd may need tweaking as well. Table 10-5 and subsequent paragraphs touch on some syslogd startup flags that are particularly relevant to security. For a complete list, you should refer to the manpage sysklogd (8).

In addition, note that when you’re changing and testing syslog’s configuration and startup options, it usually makes sense to start and stop syslogd and klogd in tandem (see the “What About klogd?” sidebar at the beginning of this chapter if you don’t know what klogd is). Since it also makes sense to start and stop these the same way your system does, I recommend that you use your system’s syslog/klogd startup script.

On most Linux systems, both facilities are controlled by the same startup script, named either /etc/init.d/syslog or /etc/init.d/sysklog (“sysklog” is shorthand for “syslog and klogd”). See Table 10-5 for a list of some of syslogd’s flags.

### Table 10-5. Some useful syslogd flags

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flag</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-m minutes btwn marks</td>
<td>Minutes between “mark” messages (timestamp-only messages that, depending on your viewpoint, either clarify or clutter logs. A value of 0 signifies “no marks”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-a /additional/socket</td>
<td>Used to specify additional sockets, besides /dev/log, on which syslogd should listen for messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-f /path/to/syslog.conf</td>
<td>Used to provide the path/name of syslog.conf, if different than /etc/syslog.conf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-r</td>
<td>Listens for syslog messages from remote hosts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first syslogd flag we’ll discuss is the only one used by default in Red Hat 7.x in its /etc/init.d/syslog script. This flag is -m 0, which disables mark messages. mark messages contain only a timestamp and the string --MARK--, which some people find useful for navigating lengthy log files. Others find them distracting and redundant, given that each message has its own timestamp anyhow.

To turn mark messages on, specify a positive nonzero value after -m that tells syslogd how many minutes should pass before it sends itself a mark message. Remember that mark has its own facility (called, predictably, “mark”) and that you must specify at least one selector that matches mark messages (such as mark.*, which matches all messages sent to the mark facility, or **, which matches all messages in all facilities).
For example, to make `syslogd` generate `mark` messages every 30 minutes and record them in `/var/log/messages`, you would first add a line to `/etc/syslog.conf` similar to Example 10-6.

Example 10-6. `syslog.conf` selector for mark-messages

```
mark.*                            -/var/log/messages
```

You would then need to start `syslogd`, as shown in Example 10-7.

Example 10-7. Invoking `syslogd` with 30-minute marks

```
mylinuxbox:/etc/init.d# ./syslogd -m 30
```

Another useful `syslogd` flag is `-a [socket]`. This allows you to specify one or more sockets (in addition to `/dev/log` for `syslogd`) from which to accept messages.

In Chapter 6, we used this flag to allow a chrooted `named` process to bounce its messages off of a `dev/log` socket (device-file) in the chroot jail to the nonchrooted `syslogd` process. In that example, BIND was running in a “padded cell” (subset of the full filesystem) and had its own log socket, `/var/named/dev/log`. We therefore changed a line in `/etc/init.d/syslog` that read as shown in Example 10-8.

Example 10-8. `init.d/syslog` line invoking `syslogd` to read messages from a chroot jail

```
daemon syslogd -m 0 -a /var/named/dev/log
```

(Note that the “daemon” function at the beginning of this line is unique to Red Hat’s `init` script functions; the important part here is `syslogd -m 0 -a /var/named/dev/log`.)

More than one `-a` flag may be specified (Example 10-9).

Example 10-9. Invoking `syslogd` with multiple “additional log device” directives

```
syslogd -a /var/named/dev/log -a /var/otherchroot/dev/log -a /additional/dev/log
```

Continuing down the list of flags in Table 10-5, suppose you need to test a new syslog configuration file named `syslog.conf.test`, but you prefer not to overwrite `/etc/syslog.conf`, which is where `syslogd` looks for its configuration file by default. Use the `-f` flag to tell `syslogd` to use your new configuration file (Example 10-10).

Example 10-10. Specifying the path to `syslogd`’s configuration file

```
mylinuxbox:/etc/init.d# ./syslogd -f ./syslog.conf.test
```

We’ve already covered use of the `-r` flag, which tells `syslogd` to accept log messages from remote hosts, but we haven’t talked about the security ramifications of this. On the one hand, security is clearly enhanced when you use a centralized log server or do anything else that makes it easier for you to manage and monitor your logs.
On the other hand, you must take different threat models into account. Are your logs sensitive? If log messages traverse untrusted networks and if the inner workings of the servers that send those messages are best kept secret, then the risks may outweigh the benefit (at least, the specific benefit of syslogd’s unauthenticated clear-text remote logging mechanism).

If this is the case for you, skip to this chapter’s section on Syslog-ng. Syslog-ng can send remote messages via the TCP protocol and can therefore be used in conjunction with stunnel, ssh, and other tools that greatly enhance its security. Since syslog uses only the connectionless UDP protocol for remote logging and therefore can’t “tunnel” its messages though stunnel or ssh, syslog is inherently less securable than Syslog-ng.

If your log messages aren’t sensitive (at least the ones you send to a remote logger), then there’s still the problem of Denial of Service and message forgery attacks. If you invoke syslogd with the -r flag, it will accept all remote messages without performing any checks whatsoever on the validity of the messages themselves or on their senders. Again, this risk is most effectively mitigated by using Syslog-ng.

But one tool you can use with syslog to partially mitigate the risk of invalid remote messages is TCPwrappers. Specifically, TCPwrappers’ “hosts access” authentication mechanism provides a simple means of defining which hosts may connect and via which protocols they may connect to your log server. Hosts-access authentication is easily tricked by source-IP-spoofing (especially since syslog transactions are strictly one way), but it’s better than nothing, and it’s probably sufficient to prevent mischievous but lazy attackers from interfering with syslog.

If you’re willing to bet that it is, obtain and install TCPwrappers and refer to its hosts_access(5) manpage for details. Note that despite its name, TCPwrappers’ hosts access can be used to control UDP-based applications.

Syslog-ng

As useful and ubiquitous as syslog is, it’s beginning to show its age. Modern Unix and Unix-like systems are considerably more complex than they were when syslog was invented, and they have outgrown both syslog’s limited facilities and its primitive network-forwarding functionality.

Syslog-ng (“syslog new generation”) is an attempt to increase syslog’s flexibility by adding better message filtering, better forwarding, and eventually (though not quite yet), message integrity and encryption. In addition, Syslog-ng supports remote logging over both the TCP and UDP protocols. Syslog-ng is the brainchild of and is primarily developed and maintained by Balazs (“Bazsi”) Scheidler.
Lest you think Syslog-ng is untested or untrusted, it’s already been incorporated into Debian GNU/Linux 2.2 “Potato” as a binary package (in the “admin” section). Syslog-ng is in fact both stable and popular. Furthermore, even though its advanced security features are still works in progress, Syslog-ng can be used in conjunction with TCP “tunneling” tools such as stunnel and ssh to authenticate or encrypt log messages sent to remote hosts.

**Compiling and Installing Syslog-ng from Source Code**

The non-Debian users among you may not wish to wait for your distribution of choice to follow suit with its own binary package of Syslog-ng. Let’s start, then, with a brief description of how to compile and install Syslog-ng from source.

First, you need to obtain the latest Syslog-ng source code. As of this writing, there are two concurrent branches of Syslog-ng development. Syslog-ng Version 1.4 is the stable branch, so I recommend you use the latest release of Syslog-ng 1.4.

Version 1.5 is the experimental branch, and although it’s officially disclaimed as unstable, some people use it on production systems due to its new “field expansion” feature, which allows you to write messages in your own custom formats. If you decide this functionality is worth the risk of running experimental code, be sure to subscribe to the Syslog-ng mailing list (see [http://lists.balabit.hu/mailman/listinfo/syslog-ng](http://lists.balabit.hu/mailman/listinfo/syslog-ng) to subscribe).

Speaking of which, it probably behooves you to browse the archives of this mailing list periodically even if you stick to the stable branch of Syslog-ng. Bazsi Scheidler tends to prioritize bug fixes over documentation, so Syslog-ng documentation tends to be incomplete and even out of date.

But Bazsi not only maintains the mailing list, he also very actively participates in it, as do other very knowledgeable and helpful Syslog-ng users and contributors. Thus the mailing list is an excellent source of Syslog-ng assistance. Before posting a question, you may wish to see if anyone else has asked it first. See the Syslog-ng mailing list archives at [http://lists.balabit.hu/pipermail/syslog-ng/](http://lists.balabit.hu/pipermail/syslog-ng/).

Syslog-ng can be downloaded either directly from Bazsi Scheidler’s web site at [http://www.balabit.hu](http://www.balabit.hu) or from its Freshmeat project site at [http://freshmeat.net/projects/syslog-ng/](http://freshmeat.net/projects/syslog-ng/). In addition to Syslog-ng itself, you’ll need the source code for libol, Syslog-ng’s support library.

Unzip and untar both archives. Compile and install libol first, then Syslog-ng. For both packages the procedure is the same:

1. Change the working directory to the source’s root:
   ```bash
cd packagename
   ```

2. Run the source’s configure script:
   ```bash
   ./configure
   ```
3. Build the package:
   ```bash
   ./make
   ```

4. Install the package:
   ```bash
   ./make install
   ```

This will install everything in the default locations, which for both libol and Syslog-ng are subdirectories of `/usr/local` (e.g., `/usr/local/lib`, `/usr/local/sbin`, etc.). If you wish to install either package somewhere else—e.g., your home directory (which is not a bad place to test new software)—then in Step 2, pass that directory to `configure` with the `--prefix=` flag as in Example 10-11.

Example 10-11. Telling configure where to install the package

```bash
mylinuxbox:/usr/src/libol-0.2.23# ./configure --prefix=/your/dir/here
```

After both libol and Syslog-ng have been compiled and installed, you need to set up a few things in Syslog-ng’s operating environment. First, create the directory `/etc/syslog-ng`. Next, copy one or more of the example `syslog-ng.conf` files into this directory from the source-distribution’s `contrib/` and `doc/` directories (unless you intend to create your `syslog-ng.conf` completely from scratch).

Finally, you need to create a startup script for `syslog-ng` in `/etc/init.d` and symbolic links to it in the appropriate runlevel directories (for most Linux distributions, `/etc/rc2.d`, `/etc/rc3.d`, and `/etc/rc5.d`). Sample `syslog-ng` init scripts for several Linux distributions are provided in the Syslog-ng source distribution’s `contrib/` directory. If you don’t find one there that works for you, it’s a simple matter to make a copy of your old `syslog` or `sysklogd` init-script and hack it to start `syslog-ng` rather than `syslogd`.

### Running syslog-ng

It’s premature to start `syslog-ng` before you’ve created a configuration file. However, since `syslog-ng` has so few startup flags, I’ll mention them in brief and spend the remainder of this section on `syslog-ng.conf` use.

The only flags supported by the `syslog-ng` daemon are listed in Table 10-6.

Table 10-6. syslog-ng startup flags

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flag</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>-d</code></td>
<td>Print debugging messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>-v</code></td>
<td>Print even more debugging messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>-f filename</code></td>
<td>Use <code>filename</code> as the configuration file (default=<code>/etc/syslog-ng/syslog-ng.conf</code>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>-V</code></td>
<td>Print version number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>-p pidfilename</code></td>
<td>Name process-ID-file <code>pidfilename</code> (default=<code>/var/run/syslog-ng.pid</code>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In normal use, set these flags in the startup script you installed or created when you installed Syslog-ng, and use that script not only automatically at startup time, but also manually if you need to restart or stop Syslog-ng afterwards.

**Configuring Syslog-ng**

There’s quite a bit more involved in configuring Syslog-ng than with syslog, but that’s a symptom of its flexibility. Once you understand how `syslog-ng.conf` works, writing your own configurations is simple, and adapting sample configurations for your own purposes is even simpler. Its main drawback is its sketchy documentation; hopefully, what follows here will mitigate that drawback for you.

By default, Syslog-ng’s configuration file is named `syslog-ng.conf` and resides in `/etc/syslog-ng/`. Let’s dissect a simple example of one in Example 10-12.

*Example 10-12. A simple syslog-ng.conf file*

```
# Simple syslog-ng.conf file.
options {
    use_fqdn(no);
    sync(0);
};

source s_sys { unix-stream("/dev/log"); internal(); };
source s_net { udp(); };

destination d_security { file("/var/log/security"); };
destination d_messages { file("/var/log/messages"); };
destination d_console { usertty("root"); };

filter f_authpriv { facility(auth, authpriv); };
filter f_messages { level(info .. emerg)
    and not facility(auth, authpriv); };
filter f_emergency { level(emerg); };

log { source(s_sys); filter(f_authpriv); destination(d_security); };
log { source(s_sys); filter(f_messages); destination(d_messages); };
log { source(s_sys); filter(f_emergency); destination(d_console); };
```

As you can see, a `syslog-ng.conf` file consists of `options[]`, `source[]`, `destination[]`, `filter[]`, and `log[]` statements. Each of these statements may contain additional settings, usually delimited by semicolons.

Syntactically, `syslog-ng.conf` is very similar to C and other structured programming languages. Statements are terminated by semicolons; whitespace is ignored and may therefore be used to enhance readability (e.g., by breaking up and indenting lengthy statements across several lines).
After defining global options, message sources, message destinations, and message filters, combine them to create logging rules.

**Global options**

Global options are set in `syslog-ng.conf`'s `options{}` section. Some options may be used in the `options{}` section and in one or more other sections. Predictably, options set within `source{}`, `destination{}`, `filter{}`, and `log{}` sections overrule those set in `options{}`. Table 10-7 lists some of the most useful of `Syslog-ng`'s options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>schain_hostnames( yes</td>
<td>no )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sskeep_hostname( yes</td>
<td>no )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssuse_fqdn( yes</td>
<td>no )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssuse_dns( yes</td>
<td>no )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssuse_time_recv( yes</td>
<td>no )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sstime_reopen( NUMBER )</td>
<td>Number of seconds after a tcp connection dies before reconnecting (default=60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sstime_reap( NUMBER )</td>
<td>Number of seconds to wait before closing an inactive file (i.e., an open log file to which no messages have been written for the specified length of time) (default=60).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sslog_fifo_size( NUMBER )²</td>
<td>Number of messages to queue in memory before processing if <code>syslog-ng</code> is busy; note that when queue is full, new messages will be dropped, but the larger the fifo size, the greater <code>syslog-ng</code>'s RAM footprint (default=100).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssync( NUMBER )²</td>
<td>Number of lines (messages) written to a log file before file is synchronized (default=0).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssdate( string )²</td>
<td>Owner of log files <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=root).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sslog_group( string )²</td>
<td>Group for log files <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=root).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sslog_perm( NUMBER )²</td>
<td>File-permissions for log files <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=0600).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sscreate_dirs( yes</td>
<td>no )²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssdir_owner( string )²</td>
<td>Owner of directories <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=root).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssdir_group( string )²</td>
<td>Group for directories <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=root).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ssdir_perm( NUMBER )²</td>
<td>Directory permissions for directories <code>syslog-ng</code> creates (default=0700).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² These options may also be used in `file()` declarations within `destination()` statements.
Options that deal with hostnames and their resolution (chain_hostname(), keep_hostname(), use_fqdn(), and use_dns) deal specifically with the hostnames of remote log clients and not with hostnames/IPs referenced in the body of the message.

In other words, if syslog-ng.conf on a central log server contains this statement:

```
options { use_dns(yes); };
```

and the remote host joe-bob, whose IP address is 10.9.8.7, sends this message:

```
Sep 13 19:56:56 s_sys@10.9.8.7 sshd[13037]: Accepted publickey for ROOT from 10.9.8.254 port 1355 ssh2
```

then the log server will log:

```
Sep 13 19:56:56 s_sys@joebob sshd[13037]: Accepted publickey for ROOT from 10.9.8.254 port 1355 ssh2
```

As you can see, 10.9.8.7 was resolved to joebob, but 10.9.8.254 wasn’t looked up. (For now you can disregard the s_sys@ in front of the hostname; I’ll explain that shortly.) The use_dns(yes) statement applies only to the hostname at the beginning of the message indicating which host sent it; it doesn’t apply to other IP addresses that may occur later in the message.

Note also that options related to files and directories may be specified both in the global options{} statement and as modifiers to file() definitions within destination{} statements. file() options, when different from their global counterparts, override them. This allows you to create a “rule of thumb” with specific exceptions.

The chain_hostname() and keep_hostname() options are also worth mentioning. By default, keep_hostname() is set to no, meaning that syslog-ng will not take the hostname supplied by a remote log server at face value; syslog-ng will instead resolve the source IPs of packets from that host to determine for itself what that host’s name is. This is in contrast to syslog, which takes remote hosts’ names at face value.

chain_hostname() determines whether syslog-ng should list all hosts through which each message has been relayed. By default, this option is set to yes.

Example 10-13 illustrates the effects of keep_hostname(no) and chain_hostname(yes) (i.e., syslog-ng’s default behavior). It shows a log message (in this case, a syslog-ng startup notification) being generated locally and then relayed twice. host1, who gives its hostname as “linux,” generates the message and then sends it to host2. host2 records both “linux” and “host1,” having double checked that hostname itself via DNS. Finally, the message is relayed to host3.

**Example 10-13. A log message relayed from one host to two others**

**Original log entry on host1:**
```
Sep 19 22:57:16 s_loc@linux syslog-ng[1656]: syslog-ng version 1.4.13 starting
```

**Entry as sent to and recorded by host2:**
```
Sep 19 22:57:16 s_loc@linux/host1 syslog-ng[1656]: syslog-ng version 1.4.13 starting
```

```
There are several interesting things to note in this example. First, you can see that in the second entry (the one logged by host2), Syslog-ng does not clearly indicate that “linux” is actually host1—it simply adds the “real” hostname after the “fake” one in the slash-delimited hostname chain.

Second, the timestamp is identical in all three log entries. It’s unlikely that three hosts would be in sync to the millisecond and be able to relay log messages amongst themselves virtually instantaneously. In fact, the timestamp given to the message by the originating host (host1 here) is preserved on each host to which the message is relayed, unless a host has its own use_time_recd() option set to “yes” (which causes syslog-ng to replace message-provided timestamps with the time at which the message was received locally).

Finally, Example 10-13 also shows that when host1 created the message, it (actually its local syslog-ng process) appended s_loc, to the message—this is the label of the source{} on host1 from which the local syslog-ng process received the message. Example 10-14 lists host1’s syslog-ng.conf file, the one responsible for the first entry shown in Example 10-13.

Example 10-14. host1’s syslog-ng.conf file

```
options { }
source s_loc { unix-stream("/dev/log"); internal(); }
destination d_host2 { udp("host2" port(514)); }
destination d_local { file("/var/log/messages"); }
log { source(s_loc); source(s_net); destination(d_host2); destination(d_local); }
```

Which brings us to the next topic: Syslog-ng message sources.

**Sources**

The syslog-ng.conf file listed in Example 10-14 contains one source{} definition, which itself contains two source “drivers” (message-inputs). syslog-ng.conf may contain many source{} definitions, each of which may, in turn, contain multiple drivers. In other words, the syntax of source definitions is as follows:

```
sourcelabel { driver1( [options] ); driver2( [options] ); etc. };
```

where sourcelabel is an arbitrary string used to identify this group of inputs, and where driver1(), driver2(), etc. are one or more source drivers that you wish to treat as a single group.

Let’s take a closer look at the source definition in Example 10-14:

```
source s_loc { unix-stream("/dev/log"); internal(); }
```

This line creates a source called s_loc that refers to messages obtained from /dev/log (i.e., the local system-log socket) and from the local syslog-ng process.
Syslog-ng is quite flexible in the variety of source drivers from which it can accept messages. In addition to Unix sockets (e.g., `/dev/log`), syslog-ng itself, and UDP streams from remote hosts, Syslog-ng can accept messages from named pipes, TCP connections from remote hosts, and special files (e.g., `/proc` files). Table 10-8 lists Syslog-ng’s supported source drivers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>internal()</td>
<td>Messages from the syslog-ng daemon itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>file(&quot;filename&quot; [options])</td>
<td>Messages read from a special file such as <code>/proc/kmsg</code>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pipe(&quot;filename&quot;)</td>
<td>Messages received from a named pipe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unix_stream(&quot;filename&quot; [options])</td>
<td>Messages received from Unix sockets that can be read from in the connection-oriented stream mode—e.g., <code>/dev/log</code> under kernels prior to 2.4; the maximum allowed number of concurrent stream connections may be specified (default=100).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unix_dgram(&quot;filename&quot; [options])</td>
<td>Messages received from Unix sockets that can be read from in the connectionless datagram mode—e.g. klogd messages from <code>/dev/log</code> under kernel 2.4.x.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tcp([ip(address)] [port(#) [max-connections(#)]] )</td>
<td>Messages received from remote hosts via the tcp protocol on the specified TCP port (default=514) on the specified local network interface (default=all); the maximum number of concurrent TCP connections may be specified (default=10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>udp([ip(address)] [port(#) ] )</td>
<td>Messages received from remote hosts via the udp protocol on the specified UDP port (default=514) on the specified local network interface (default=all).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we just saw in Example 10-14, `internal()` is syslog-ng itself: syslog-ng sends itself startup messages, errors, and other messages via this source. Therefore, you should include `internal()` in at least one `source{}` definition. `file()` is used to specify special files from which syslog-ng should retrieve messages. The special file you’d most likely want syslog-ng to read messages from is `/proc/kmsg`.

Note, however, that `file()` is not intended for use on regular text files. If you wish syslog-ng to “tail” dynamic log files written by other applications (e.g., `httpd`), you’ll need to write a script that pipes the output from a `tail -f [filename]` command to `logger`. (For instructions on using `logger`, see the section “Testing System Logging with logger” later in this chapter.)

`unix_stream()` and `unix_dgram()` are important drivers: these read messages from connection-oriented and connectionless Unix sockets, respectively. As noted at the end of “Compiling and Installing Syslog-ng from Source Code,” Linux kernels Versions 2.4.1 and higher use Unix datagram sockets; if you specify `/dev/log` as a `unix_stream()` source, kernel messages won’t be captured. Therefore, use `unix_dgram()` when defining your local-system log source, e.g.:

```
source s_loc { unix-dgram("/dev/log"); internal(); };
```
If your kernel is pre-2.4.0, you should instead use `unix_stream()` for `/dev/log`.

`tcp()` and `udp()` read messages from remote hosts via the connection-oriented TCP protocol and the connectionless UDP protocol, respectively. In both `tcp()` and `udp()`, a listening address and a port number may be specified. By default, `syslog-ng` listens on `0.0.0.0:514`—that is, “all interfaces, port 514.” (Specifically, the default for `tcp()` is `0.0.0.0:TCP514`, and for `udp()`, that is `0.0.0.0:UDP514`.)

Example 10-15 shows source statements for `tcp()` and `udp()`, with IP and port options defined.

**Example 10-15. `tcp()` and `udp()` sources**

```plaintext
source s_tcpmessages { tcp( ip(192.168.190.190) port(10514) ); };
source s_udpmessages { udp(); };
```

In Example 10-15, we’re defining the source `s_tcpmessages` as all messages received on TCP port 10514, but only on the local network interface whose IP address is 192.168.190.190. The source `s_udpmessages`, however, accepts all UDP messages received on UDP port 514 on all local network interfaces.

Besides `ip()` and `port()`, there’s one more source option I’d like to cover. `max_connections()`, which can only be used in `tcp()` and `unix_stream()` sources, restricts the number of simultaneous connections from a given source that `syslog-ng` will accept. This is a tradeoff between security and performance: if this number is high, then few messages will be dropped when the server is under load, but at the expense of resources. If this number is low, the chance that logging activity will bog down the server is minimized, but whenever the number of maximum connections is reached, messages will be dropped until a connection is freed up.

The correct syntax for `max_connections()` is simple: specify a positive integer between the parentheses. For example, let’s adapt the `tcp()` source from Example 10-15 to accept a maximum of 100 concurrent TCP connections from remote hosts:

```plaintext
source s_tcpmessages { tcp( ip(192.168.190.190) port(10514) max-connections(100) ); };
```

By default, `max_connections()` is set to 100 for `unix-stream()` sources and 10 for `tcp()` sources.

By the way, TCP port 514 is the default listening port not only for `syslog-ng`, but also for `rshd`. This isn’t a big deal, for the simple reason that `rshd` has no business running on an ostensibly secure Internet-accessible system. If, for example, you wish to use both `syslog-ng` and `rshd` on an intranet server (even then I recommend `sshd` instead), then you should specify a different (unused) port for `syslog-ng` to accept TCP connections on.

**Destinations**

`syslog-ng` can be configured to send messages to the same places `syslog` can: ASCII files, named pipes, remote hosts via UDP, and TTYs. In addition, `syslog-ng` can send
messages to Unix sockets, remote hosts via TCP, and to the standard inputs of programs. Table 10-9 lists the allowed destination types (called “drivers”) in Syslog-ng.

Table 10-9. Supported destination drivers in syslog-ng.conf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>file(&quot;filename[$MACROS]&quot; )</td>
<td>Write messages to standard ASCII-text log file. If file doesn’t exist, syslog-ng will create it. Macros may be used within or in lieu of a filename; these allow dynamic naming of files (see Table 10-10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tcp(&quot;address&quot; [port(#);] )</td>
<td>Transmit messages via TCP to the specified TCP port (default=514) on the specified IP address or hostname. (You must specify an address or name.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>udp(&quot;address&quot; [port(#);] )</td>
<td>Transmit messages via UDP to the specified UDP port (default=514) on the specified IP address or hostname. (You must specify an address or name.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pipe(&quot;pipename&quot;)</td>
<td>Send messages to a named pipe such as /dev/xconsole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unix_stream(&quot;filename&quot; [options])</td>
<td>Send messages in connection-oriented stream mode to a Unix socket such as /dev/log.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unix_dgram(&quot;filename&quot; [options])</td>
<td>Send messages in connectionless datagram mode to a Unix socket such as /dev/log.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usertty( username )</td>
<td>Send messages to specified user’s console.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program(&quot;/path/to/program&quot;)</td>
<td>Send messages to standard input of specified program with specified options.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with ordinary syslog, the most important type of destination is file(). Unlike with syslog, Syslog-ng supports filename-expansion macros and a number of options that give one much more granular control over how log files are handled.

When you specify the name of a file for syslog-ng to write messages to, you may use macros to create all or part of the filename. For example, to tell syslog-ng to write messages to a file whose name includes the current day, you could define a destination like this:

```bash
destination d_dailylog { file("/var/log/messages.$WEEKDAY"); };
```

When Syslog-ng writes to this particular destination, it will use the filename /var/log/messages.Tues, /var/log/messages.Wed, etc., depending on what day it is. See Table 10-10 for a complete list of supported filename macros.

Table 10-10. Macros supported in file() destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro</th>
<th>Expands to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROGRAM</td>
<td>The name of the program that sent the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOST</td>
<td>The name of the host that originated the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACILITY</td>
<td>The facility to which the message was logged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with syslog, if a file specified in a file() destination doesn’t exist, syslog-ng will create it. Unlike syslog, Syslog-ng has a number of options that can be implemented both globally and on a per-log-file basis. (Global settings are overridden by per-log-file settings, allowing you to create “general rules” with exceptions.)

For example, whether and how syslog-ng creates new directories for its log files is controlled via the options create_dirs(), dir_owner(), dir_group(), and dir_perm(). Example 10-16 illustrates the use of these options within a destination{} statement.

Example 10-16. Controlling a file() destination’s directory-creating behavior

```
destination d_mylog { file("/var/log/ngfiles/mylog" create_dirs=yes dir_owner(root) dir_group(root) dir_perm(0700)); };
```

Example 10-16 also happens to show the default values of the dir_owner(), dir_group(), and dir_perm() options. While this may seem unrealistic (why would anyone go to the trouble of setting an option to its default?), it’s necessary if nondefaults are specified in a global options{} statement and you want the default values used for a specific file—remember, options set in a destination{} statement override those set in an options{} statement.

Other global/file-specific options can be used to set characteristics of the log file itself: owner(), group(), and perm(), which by default are set to root, root, and 0600, respectively. In case you’re wondering, there is no create_file() option—syslog-ng has the irrevocable ability to create files (unless that file’s path includes a nonexistent directory and create_dirs() is set to no). Example 10-17 shows a destination definition that includes these options.

Example 10-17. Options that affect file properties

```
destination d_micklog { file("/var/log/micklog" owner(mick) group(wheel) perm(0640)); };
```
The other `file()` option we’ll cover here is `sync()`, which can be used to limit the frequency with which log files are synchronized. This is analogous to syslog’s “-” prefix, but much more granular: whereas the “-” merely turns off synchronization, `file()` accepts a numeric value that delays synchronization to as many or as few messages as you like.

The higher the value, the more messages are cached prior to filesystem synchronization and, therefore, the fewer “open for read” actions on the filesystem. The lower the number, the lower the chances of data loss and the lower the delay between a message being processed and written to disk.

By default, `sync()` is set to zero, meaning “synchronize after each message.” In general, the default or a low `sync()` value is preferable for low-volume scenarios, but numbers in the 100s or even 1,000s may be necessary in high-volume situations. A good rule of thumb is to set this value to the approximate number of log-message lines per second your system must handle at peak loads.

If you use a log monitor such as Swatch (described later in this chapter) to be alerted of attacks in progress, don’t set `sync()` too high. If an intruder deletes a log file, all of Syslog-ng’s cached messages will be lost without having been parsed by the log monitor. (Log monitors parse messages as they are written, not beforehand.)

**Filters**

And now we come to some of the serious magic in Syslog-ng: message filters. Filters, while strictly optional, allow you to route messages based not only on priority/level and facility (which syslog can do), but also on the name of the program that sent the message, the name of the host that forwarded it over the network, a regular expression evaluated against the message itself, or even the name of another filter.

A `filter{}` statement consists of a label (the filter’s name) and one or more criteria connected by operators (and, or, and not are supported). Table 10-11 lists the different types of criteria that a `filter{}` statement may contain.

**Table 10-11. filter{} functions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function (criterion)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>facility( facility-name )</code></td>
<td>Facility to which the message was logged (see Table 10-1 for facility names).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>priority( priority-name )</code></td>
<td>Priority assigned to the message (see Table 10-2 for priority-names); a list of priorities separated by commas may be specified, or a range of priorities expressed as two priorities (upper and lower limits) separated by two periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>level( priority-name )</code></td>
<td>Same as <code>priority()</code>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>program( program-name )</code></td>
<td>Program that created the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>host( hostname )</code></td>
<td>Host from which message was received.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 10-18 shows several filter{} statements taken from the default syslog-ng.conf file included in Debian 2.2’s syslog-ng package.

Example 10-18. Filters

```plaintext
filter f_mail { facility(mail); }
filter f_debug { not facility(auth, authpriv, news, mail); }
filter f_messages { level(info .. warn) and not facility(auth, authpriv, cron, daemon, mail, news); }
filter f_cother { level(debug, info, notice, warn) or facility(daemon, mail); }
```

The first line in Example 10-17, filter f_mail, matches all messages logged to the mail facility. The second filter, f_debug, matches all messages not logged to the auth, authpriv, news, and mail facilities.

The third filter, f_messages, matches messages of priority levels info through warn, except those logged to the auth, authpriv, cron, daemon, mail, and news facilities. The last filter, called f_cother, matches all messages of priority levels debug, info, notice, and warn, and also all messages logged to the daemon and mail facilities.

When you create your own filters, be sure to test them using the logger command. See the section entitled “Testing System Logging with logger” later in this chapter.

Log statements

Now we combine the elements we’ve just defined (sources, filters, and destinations) into log{} statements. Arguably, these are the simplest statements in syslog-ng.conf: each consists only of a semicolon-delimited list of source(), destination(), and, optionally, filter() references. (Filters are optional because a log{} statement containing only source() and destination() references will send all messages from the specified sources to all specified destinations.)

Elements from several previous examples are combined in Example 10-19, which culminates in several log{} statements.

Example 10-19. Another sample syslog-ng.conf file

```plaintext
source s_loc { unix-stream("/dev/log"); internal(); }
source s_tcpmessages { tcp( ip(192.168.190.190); port(10514)); }

destination d_dailylog { file("/var/log/messages.$WEEKDAY"); }
destination d_micklog { file("/var/log/micklog" owner(mick) perm(0600)); }

filter f_mail { facility(mail); }
```

---

Table 10-11. filter{} functions (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function (criterion)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>match( regular-expression )</td>
<td>Regular expression to evaluate against the message's body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filter( filter-name )</td>
<td>Other filter to evaluate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As you can see in this example, all messages from the host 192.168.190.190 are written to the log file `/var/log/micklog`, as are all local mail messages. Messages that match the `f_messages()` filter are written to the log file `/var/log/messages. `$WEEKDAY`, e.g., `/var/log/Sun`, `/var/log/Mon`, etc.

Example 10-19 isn’t very realistic, though: no non-mail messages with priority-level higher than `warn` are dealt with. This begs the question, “Can I get `syslog-ng` to filter on ‘none of the above?’” The answer is yes: to match all messages that haven’t yet matched filters in previous `log()` statements, you can use the built-in filter `DEFAULT`. The following line, if added to the bottom of Example 10-18, will cause all messages not processed by any of the prior three `log()` statements to be written to the daily log file:

```
log { source(s_loc); filter(DEFAULT); destination(d_dailylog); };
```

**Advanced Configurations**

As you’re hopefully convinced of by this point, Syslog-ng is extremely flexible, so much so that it isn’t feasible to illustrate all possible Syslog-ng configurations. I would be remiss, however, if I didn’t list at least one advanced `syslog-ng.conf` file.

Example 10-20 shows a setup that causes `syslog-ng` to watch out for login failures and access denials by matching messages against a regular expression and then sending the messages to a shell script (listed in Example 10-21).

```
source s_local { unix_stream("dev/log"); internal(); }

filter f_denials { match("[Dd]enied|[Ff]ail"); }

destination d_mailtomick { program("/usr/local/sbin/mailtomick.sh"); }

log { source(s_local); filter(f_denials); destination(d_mailtomick); }
```

**Example 10-20. Using syslog-ng as its own log watcher**

# WARNING: while this syslog-ng.conf file is syntactically correct and complete, it is
# intended for illustrative purposes only -- entire categories of message
# are ignored!

```
source s_local { unix_stream("dev/log"); internal(); }

filter f_denials { match("[Dd]enied|[Ff]ail"); }

destination d_mailtomick { program("/usr/local/sbin/mailtomick.sh"); }

log { source(s_local); filter(f_denials); destination(d_mailtomick); }
```

**Example 10-21. Script for emailing log messages**

```
#!/bin/bash
# mailtomick.sh
#
# Script which listens for standard input and emails each line to mick
#
```
The most important lines in Example 10-20 are the filter `f_denials` and the destination `d_mailtomick`. The filter uses a `match()` directive containing a regular expression that matches the strings “denied,” “Denied,” “Fail,” and “fail.” The destination `d_mailtomick` sends messages via a `program()` declaration to the standard input of a script I wrote called `/usr/local/sbin/mailtomick.sh`.

Before we go further in the analysis, here’s an important caveat: `program()` opens the specified program once and leaves it open until syslog-ng is stopped or restarted. Keep this in mind when deciding whether to use `pipe()` or `program()` (i.e., `pipe()` doesn’t do this), and in choosing what sort of applications you invoke with `program()`.

In some cases, keeping a script open (actually a bash process) is a waste of resources and even a security risk (if you run syslog-ng as root). Furthermore, the particular use of email in Examples 10-19 and 10-20 introduces the possibility of Denial of Service attacks (e.g., filling up the system administrator’s mailbox). But under the right circumstances, such as on a non-Internet-accessible host that has a few CPU cycles to spare, this is a legitimate use of Syslog-ng.

The script itself, `/usr/local/sbin/mailtomick.sh`, simply reads lines from the standard input and emails each line to `mick@pinheads-on-ice.net`. Since syslog-ng needs to keep this script open, the `read` command is contained in an endless loop. This script will run until the syslog-ng process that invoked it is restarted or killed.

In the interest of focusing on the most typical uses of Syslog-ng, I’ve listed some `syslog-ng.conf` options without giving examples of their usage and omitted a couple of other options altogether. Suffice it to say that the global/file option `log_fifo_size()` and the global options `time_reap()`, `time_reopen()`, `gc_idle_threshold()`, and `gc_busy_threshold()` are useful for tuning syslog-ng’s performance to fit your particular environment.

The official (maintained) documentation for Syslog-ng is the Syslog-ng Reference Manual. PostScript, SGML, HTML, and ASCII text versions of this document are included in the `/doc` directory of Syslog-ng’s source-code distribution.

For advanced or otherwise unaddressed issues, the best source of Syslog-ng information is the Syslog-ng mailing list and its archives. See http://lists.balabit.hu/mailman/listinfo/syslog-ng for subscription information and archives.

* If you’re completely new to regular expressions, I highly recommend Mastering Regular Expressions by Jeffrey E. F. Friedl (O’Reilly).
Testing System Logging with logger

Before we leave the topic of system-logger configuration and use, we should cover a tool that can be used to test your new configurations, regardless of whether you use syslog or Syslog-ng: logger. logger is a command-line application that sends messages to the system logger. In addition to being a good diagnostic tool, logger is especially useful for adding logging functionality to shell scripts.

The usage we’re interested in here, of course, is diagnostics. It’s easiest to explain how to use logger with an example.

Suppose you’ve just reconfigured syslog to send all daemon messages with priority “warn” to /var/log/warnings. To test the new syslog.conf file, you’d first restart syslogd and klogd and then you’d enter a command like the one in Example 10-22.

Example 10-22. Sending a test message with logger

```
mylinuxbox:~# logger -p daemon.warn "This is only a test."
```

As you can see, logger’s syntax is simple. The -p parameter allows you to specify a facility.priority selector. Everything after this selector (and any other parameters or flags) is taken to be the message.

Because I’m a fast typist, I often use while…do…done statements in interactive bash sessions to run impromptu scripts (actually, just complex command lines). Example 10-23’s sequence of commands works interactively or as a script.

Example 10-23. Generating test messages from a bash prompt

```
mylinuxbox:~# for i in {debug,info,notice,warning,err,crit,alert,emerg} 
  > do
  >   logger -p daemon.$i "Test daemon message, level $i"
  > done
```

This sends tests messages to the daemon facility for each of all eight priorities.

Example 10-24, presented in the form of an actual script, generates messages for all facilities at each priority level.

Example 10-24. Generating even more test messages with a bash script

```
#!/bin/bash

for i in {auth,auth-priv,cron,daemon,kern,lpr,mail,mark,news,syslog,user,uucp,local0,local1,local2,local3,local4,local5,local6,local7} 
  # (this is all one line!)
  do
    for k in {debug,info,notice,warning,err,crit,alert,emerg}
      do
        logger -p $i.$k "Test daemon message, facility $i priority $k"
      done
  done
```
Logger works with both syslog and Syslog-ng.

Managing System-Log Files

Configuring and fine-tuning your system-logging facilities is extremely important for system security and general diagnostics. But if your logs grow too large and fill up their filesystem, all that work may come to naught.

As with syslog itself, most Linux distributions come with a preconfigured log-rotation scheme. As with syslog, while this scheme tends to work adequately for many users, it’s too important a mechanism to take for granted: it behooves you to understand, periodically evaluate, and, if necessary, customize your log-management setup.

Log Management in Red Hat 7 and Debian 2.2: /sbin/logrotate

Both Red Hat 7 and Debian 2.2 use a binary program called logrotate to handle system-log growth. In fact, they use very similar implementations of logrotate: global options and low-level (system) log files are addressed in /etc/logrotate.conf, and application-specific configuration scripts are kept in /etc/logrotate.d/.

When logrotate is run, all scripts in /etc/logrotate.d are included into logrotate.conf and parsed as one big script. This makes logrotate’s configuration very modular: when you install an RPM or DEB package (of software that creates logs), your package manager automatically installs a script in /etc/logrotate.d, which will be removed later if you uninstall the package.

Actually, the include directive in logrotate.conf may be used to specify additional or different directories and files to include. In no event, however, should you remove the statement that includes /etc/logrotate.d if you use Red Hat or Debian, both of whose package managers depend on this directory for package-specific log-rotation scripts.

Syntax of logrotate.conf and its included scripts

There are really only two types of elements in logrotate.conf and its included scripts: directives (i.e., options) and log-file specifications. A directive is simply a parameter or a variable declaration; a log-file specification is a group of directives that apply to a specific log file or group of log files.

In Example 10-25, we see a simple /etc/logrotate.conf file.
Example 10-25. Simple logrotate.conf file

```
# Very simple logrotate.conf file

# Global options: rotate logs monthly, saving four old copies and sending
# error-messages to root. After "rotating out" a file, touch a new one

monthly
rotate 4
errors root
create

# Keep an eye on /var/log/messages
/var/log/messages {
    create
    postrotate
        /bin/kill -HUP `cat /var/run/syslog-ng.pid 2> /dev/null` 2> /dev/null || true
    endscript
}
```

In Example 10-25, the global options at the top may be thought of as the default log-file specification. Any directive for a specific log file takes precedence over the global options. Accordingly, we see in this example that although by default logs are rotated once a month and that four archives will be kept, the file `/var/log/messages` will be rotated not on the basis of time, but on size.

However, the other global directives will still apply: four old copies will be kept; immediately after a log is renamed (which is how they’re “rotated”), a newly empty current log file will be created (“touched”); and error messages will be emailed to `root`.

`logrotate` supports a large number of different directives, but in practice, you’ll probably spend more time tweaking the subscripts placed in `logrotate.d` than you will writing scripts from scratch. With that in mind, Table 10-12 lists some commonly encountered `logrotate` directives. A complete list is provided in the manpage `logrotate(8)`.

Table 10-12. Common logrotate directives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directive</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>/path/to/logfile {</code></td>
<td>Log file specification header/footer (i.e., “apply these directives to the file <code>/path/to/logfile</code>). Whitespace is ignored. Applicable global directives are also applied to the log file, but when a given directive is specified both globally and locally (within a log file specification), the local setting overrules the global one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directive1`</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directive2`</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.`</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| `
` | |
| `rotate number` | Tells `logrotate` to retain `number` old versions of the specified log file. Setting this to zero amounts to telling `logrotate` to overwrite the old log file. |
Table 10-12. Common logrotate directives (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directive</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>daily</td>
<td>weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mail[username@mail@address]</td>
<td>Email old files to the specified local user or email address rather than deleting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>errors[username@mail@address]</td>
<td>Email logrotate error messages to the specified local user or email address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compress</td>
<td>Use gzip to compress old versions of log files.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>copytruncate</td>
<td>Instead of renaming the current log file and creating a new (empty) one, move most of its data out into an archive file. Accommodates programs that can’t interrupt logging (i.e., that need to keep the log file open for writing continuously).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>create [octalmode owner group]</td>
<td>Recreate the (now empty) log file immediately after rotation. If specified, set any or all of these properties: octalmode (file-mode in octal notation—e.g., 0700), owner, and group properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ifempty</td>
<td>notifempty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>include file_or_directory</td>
<td>When parsing logrotate.conf, include the specified file or the files in the specified directory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missingok</td>
<td>nomissingok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>olddir dir</td>
<td>noolddir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postrotate</td>
<td>line1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prerotate</td>
<td>line1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Running logrotate

In both Red Hat 7 and Debian 2.2, logrotate is invoked by the script /etc/cron.daily/logrotate, which consists of a single command:

```
/usr/sbin/logrotate /etc/logrotate.conf
```

This doesn’t necessarily mean that logs are rotated daily; it means that logrotate checks each log file daily against its configuration script and rotates or doesn’t rotate the log file accordingly.

If you want logrotate to be run less frequently, you can move this script to /etc/cron.weekly or even /etc/cron.monthly (though the latter is emphatically not recommended unless logrotate is, for some strange reason, configured to rotate each and every file monthly).

Log Management in SuSE 7

Log rotation in SuSE, as with so much else, is configured at a gross level in /etc/rc.config (the configuration file for suseconfig, which is the primary backend engine of yast). This file contains a variable called MAX_DAYS_FOR_LOG_FILES, which you
can use to set the maximum number of days system logs are kept (by default, 365). In addition, the log-rotation tools themselves come preconfigured and preactivated.

Chances are, however, that you’ll need to tweak SuSE’s log-management setup more granularly than `MAX_DAYS_FOR_LOG_FILES`, especially if you install Syslog-ng and disable syslog. As it happens, SuSE’s log-rotation scheme is less powerful but also much simpler than Red Hat’s and Debian’s `logrotate`.

SuSE uses a script called `/etc/cron.daily/aaa_base_rotate_logs` for day-to-day log rotation. This script shouldn’t be manually edited; its behavior is controlled by the file `/etc/logfiles`, which is simply a list of the files you wish to rotate along with the maximum sizes you want them to reach, the permissions and ownerships they should have, and the startup script (if any) that should be restarted after rotation is done.

Example 10-26 is an excerpt from the default `/etc/logfiles` from SuSE 7.1.

Example 10-26. Excerpts from `/etc/logfiles`

```bash
# /etc/logfiles - This file tells cron.daily, which log files have to be watched
#
# File                       max size   mode     ownership    service
#                                                           (reload if changed)
/var/log/mgetty.*              +1024k   644      root.root
/var/log/messages              +4096k   640      root.root
/var/log/httpd/access_log      +4096k   644      root.root     apache
/var/squid/logs/access.log     +4096k   640      squid.root
```

In the first noncomment line, all log files whose name begins `/var/log/mgetty` will be rotated after exceeding 1,024 kilobytes, after which they’ll be rotated to new files whose permissions are `-rw-r--r--` and that are owned by user `root` and group `root`.

The third line states that the file `/var/log/httpd/access_log` should be rotated after exceeding 4,096 kilobytes, should be recreated with permissions `-rw-r--r--`, owned by user `root` and group `root`, and after rotation is done, the startup script `/etc/init.d/apache` should be restarted.

Since the maximum age of all log files is set globally in `/etc/rc.config`, take care not to set the maximum size of a frequently written-to file (such as `/var/log/messages`) too high. If this happens and if the maximum age is high enough, your logs may fill their volume.

Speaking of which, I highly recommend the use of a dedicated `/var` partition on any machine that acts as a server; a full `/var` partition is much less likely to cause disruptive system behavior (e.g., crashing) than a full root partition.

## Using Swatch for Automated Log Monitoring

Okay, you’ve painstakingly configured, tested, and fine-tuned your system logger to sort system messages by type and importance and then log them both to their respective files and to a central log server. You’ve also configured a log-rotation scheme that keeps as much old log data around as you think you’ll need.
But who’s got the time to actually read all those log messages?

swatch (the “Simple WATCHer”) does. swatch, a free log-monitoring utility written 100% in Perl, monitors logs as they’re being written and takes action when it finds something you’ve told it to look out for. Swatch does for logs what tripwire does for system-file integrity.

### Installing Swatch

There are two ways to install swatch. First, of course, is via whatever binary package of swatch your Linux distribution of choice provides. (I use the term loosely here; “executable package” is more precise.) The current version of Mandrake has an RPM package of swatch, but none of the other most popular distributions (i.e., Red Hat, SuSE, Slackware, or Debian) appear to.

This is just as well, though, since the second way to install swatch is quite interesting. swatch’s source distribution, available from http://www.stanford.edu/~atkins/swatch, includes a sophisticated script called Makefile.PL that automatically checks for all necessary Perl modules (see “Should We Let Perl Download and Install Its Own Modules?” later in this chapter) and uses Perl 5’s CPAN functionality to download and install any modules you need; it then generates a Makefile that can be used to build swatch.

After you’ve installed the required modules, either automatically from swatch’s Makefile.PL script or manually (and then running perl Makefile.PL), Makefile.PL should return the contents of Example 10-27.

#### Example 10-27. Successful Makefile.PL run

```
[root@barrelolofun swatch-3.0.1]# perl Makefile.PL
Checking for Time::HiRes 1.12 ... ok
Checking for Date::Calc ... ok
Checking for Date::Format ... ok
Checking for File::Tail ... ok
Checking if your kit is complete...
Looks good
Writing Makefile for swatch
[root@barrelolofun swatch-3.0.1]#
```

Once Makefile.PL has successfully created a Makefile for swatch, you can execute the following commands to build and install it:

```
make
test
install
realclean
```

The make test command is optional but useful: it ensures that swatch can properly use the Perl modules we just went to the trouble of installing.
Should We Let Perl Download and Install Its Own Modules?

The Comprehensive Perl Archive Network (CPAN) is a network of Perl software archives from around the world. Perl Version 5.6.x includes modules (CPAN and CPAN::FirstTime, among others) that allow it to fetch, verify the checksums of, and even use gcc to compile Perl modules from CPAN sites on the Internet. In-depth descriptions of CPAN and Perl's CPAN functionality are beyond this chapter's scope, but I have one hint and one warning to offer.

First, the hint. To install the module Example::Module (not a real Perl module), you enter the command:

```perl
perl -MCPAN -e "install Example::Module"
```

If it’s the first time you've used the -MCPAN flag, the module CPAN::FirstTime will be triggered and you’ll be asked to choose from various options as to how Perl should fetch and install modules from CPAN. These are well-phrased questions with reasonable defaults. But do pay attention to the output while this command executes: the module you’re installing may depend on other modules and may require you to go back and execute, e.g.:

```perl
perl -MCPAN -e "install Example::PreRequisite"
```

before making a second attempt at installing the first module.

Now for the warning: using CPAN is neither more nor less secure than downloading and installing other software from any other Internet source. On the one hand, before being installed, each downloaded module is automatically checked against a checksum that incorporates a cryptographically strong MD5 hash. On the other hand, this hash is intended to prevent corrupt downloads from going unnoticed, not to provide security per se.

Furthermore, even assuming that a given package’s checksum probably won’t be replaced along with a tampered-with module (a big assumption), all this protects against the unauthorized alteration of software after it’s been uploaded to CPAN by its author. There’s nothing to stop an evil registered CPAN developer (anybody may register as one) from uploading hostile code along with a valid checksum. But of course, there’s nothing to stop that evil developer from posting bad stuff to SourceForge or FreshMeat, either.

Thus, if you really want to be thorough, the most secure way to install a given Perl module is to:

1. Identify/locate the module on http://search.cpan.org.
2. Follow the link to CPAN’s page for the module.
3. Download the module not from CPAN, but from its developer’s official web site (listed under “Author Information” in the web page referred to earlier in Step 2).
4. If available, also download any checksum or hash provided by the developer for the tarball you just downloaded.

—continued—
swatch Configuration in Brief

Since the whole point of swatch is to simplify our lives, configuring swatch itself is, well, simple. swatch is controlled by a single file, $HOME/.swatchrc by default. This file contains text patterns, in the form of regular expressions, that you want swatch to watch for. Each regular expression is followed by the action(s) you wish to swatch to take whenever it encounters that text.

For example, suppose you’ve got an Apache-based web server and you want to be alerted any time someone attempts a buffer-overflow attack by requesting an extremely
long filename (URL). By trying this yourself against the web server while tailing its "/var/apache/error.log", you know that Apache will log an entry that includes the string “File name too long.” Suppose further that you want to be emailed every time this happens. Example 10-28 shows what you’d need to have in your .swatchrc file.

Example 10-28. Simple entry in .swatchrc

```
watchfor /File name too long/
    mail addresses=mick\@visi.com,subject=BufferOverflow_attempt
```

As you can see, the entry begins with a `watchfor` statement, followed by a regular expression. If you aren’t yet proficient in the use of regular expressions, don’t worry: this can be as simple as a snippet of the text you want `swatch` to look for, spelled out verbatim between two slashes.

Swatch will perform your choice of a number of actions when it matches your regular expression. In this example, we’ve told swatch to send email to mick\@visi.com, with a subject of `BufferOverflow_attempt`. Note the backslash before the @ sign—without it, Perl will interpret the @ sign as a special character. Note also that if you want spaces in your subject-line, each space needs to be escaped with a backslash—e.g., `subject=Buffer\ Overflow\ attempt`.

Actions besides sending email include the ones in Table 10-13.

Table 10-13. Some actions swatch can take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action (keyword)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>echo=normal, underscore, blue, inverse, etc.</td>
<td>Print matched line to console, with or without special text mode (default mode is “normal”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bell N</td>
<td>Echo the line to console, with “beep” sounded N times (default = 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exec command</td>
<td>Execute the command or script command.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pipe command</td>
<td>Pipe the line to the command command.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throttle HH:MM:SS</td>
<td>Wait for HH:MM:SS (period of time) after a line triggers a match, before performing actions on another match of the same expression. Helps prevent Denial of Service attacks via swatch (e.g., deliberately triggering huge numbers of swatch events in a short period).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more details on configuring these and the other actions that swatch supports, see the `swatch(1)` manpage.

If you use Syslog-ng, you may be able to use some combination of `match()` filters, `program()` destinations, and `pipe()` destinations to achieve most of what `swatch` does.

However, `swatch`’s `throttle` parameter is an important advantage: whereas Syslog-ng acts on every message that matches a given filter, `throttle` gives `swatch` the intelligence to ignore repeated occurrences of a given event, potentially preventing minor events from becoming major annoyances.
Let’s take that example a step further. Suppose in addition to being emailed about buffer-overflow attempts, you want to know whenever someone hits a certain web page, but only if you’re logged on to a console at the time. In the same .swatchrc file, you’d add something like Example 10-29.

Example 10-29. An event that beeps and prints to console

```
watchfor /wuzza.html/
  echo=red
  bell 2
```

You will only see these messages and hear these beeps if you are logged on to the console in the same shell session from which you launched swatch. If you log out to go get a sandwich, when you return and log back in, you will no longer see messages generated by the swatch processes launched in your old session, even though those processes will still be running.

When in doubt, add either a “mail” action or some other non console-specific action (e.g., an “exec” action that triggers a script that pages you, etc.), unless, that is, the pattern in question isn’t critical.

Alert readers have no doubt noticed that the scenario in the previous example will work only for Apache installations in which both errors and access messages are logged to the same file. We haven’t associated different expressions with different watched files, nor can we. But what if you want swatch to watch more than one log file?

This is no problem. Although each .swatchrc file may describe only one watched file, there’s nothing to stop you from running multiple instances of swatch, each with its own .swatchrc file. In other words, .swatchrc is the default, but not the required name for swatch configurations.

To split our two examples into two files, you’d put the lines in Example 10-27 into a file called, for example, .swatchrc.hterror and the lines in Example 10-28 into a file called .swatchrc.htaccess.

**Advanced swatch Configuration**

So far we’ve only considered actions we want triggered every time a given pattern is matched. There are several ways we can control swatch’s behavior with greater granularity, however.

The first and most obvious is that search patterns take the form of regular expressions. Regular expressions, which really constitute a text-formatting language of their own, are incredibly powerful and responsible for a good deal of the magic of Perl, sed, vi, and many other Unix utilities.
It behooves you to know at least a couple “regex” tricks. Trick number one is called alternation, and it adds a “logical or” to your regular expression in the form of a “|” sign. Consider this regular expression:

/reject|failed/

This expression will match any line containing either the word “reject” or the word “failed.” Use alternation when you want swatch to take the same action for more than one pattern.

Trick number two is the Perl-specific regular-expression modifier “case-insensitive,” also known as “slash-i” since it always follows a regular expression’s trailing slash. The regular expression:

/reject/i

matches any line containing the word “reject” whether it’s spelled “Reject,” “REJECT,” “rEjEcT,” etc. Granted, this isn’t nearly as useful as alternation, and in the interest of full disclosure, I’m compelled to mention that slash-i is one of the more CPU-intensive Perl modifiers. However, if despite your best efforts at log tailing, self attacking, etc., you aren’t 100% sure how a worrisome attack might look in a log file, slash-i helps you make a reasonable guess.

Another way to control swatch more precisely is to specify what time of day a given action may be performed. You can do this by sticking a when= option after any action. For example, in Example 10-30, I have a .swatchrc entry for a medium-importance event, which I want to know about via console messages during weekdays, but which I’ll need email messages to know about during the weekend.

Example 10-30. Actions with when option specified

/file system full/

  echo=red

  mail addresses=mick@visi.com,subject=Volume_Full,when=7-1:1-24

The syntax of the when= option is when=range_of_days:range_of_hours. Thus, in Example 10-30, we see that any time the message “file system full” is logged, swatch will echo the log entry to the console in red ink. It will also send email, but only if it’s Saturday (“7”) or Sunday (“1”).

Running swatch

Swatch expects .swatchrc to live in the home directory of the user who invokes swatch. Swatch also keeps its temporary files there by default. (Each time it’s invoked, it creates and runs a script called a “watcher process,” whose name ends with a dot followed by the PID of the swatch process that created it).

The -c path/to/configfile and --script-dir=/path/to/scripts flags let you specify alternate locations for swatch’s configuration and script files, respectively. Never
keep either in a world-writable directory, however. In fact, only these files’ owners should be able to read them.

For example, to invoke swatch so that it reads my custom configuration file in /var/log and also uses that directory for its watcher process script, I’d use the command listed in Example 10-31.

Example 10-31. Specifying nondefault paths

mylinuxbox:~# swatch -c /var/log/.swatchrc.access --script-dir=/var/log &

I also need to tell swatch which file to tail, and for that I need the -t filename flag. If I wanted to use the previous command to have swatch monitor /var/log/apache/access_log, it would look like this:

mylinuxbox:~# swatch -c /var/log/.swatchrc.access --script-dir=/var/log
\ -t /var/log/apache/access_log &

swatch generally doesn’t clean up after itself very well; it tends to leave watcher-process scripts behind. Keep an eye out and periodically delete these in your home directory or in the script directories you tend to specify with --script-dir.

Again, if you want swatch to monitor multiple files, you’ll need to run swatch multiple times, with at least a different tailing target (-t value) specified each time and probably a different configuration file for each as well.

Fine-Tuning swatch

Once swatch is configured and running, we must turn our attention to the Goldilocks Goal: we want swatch to be running neither “too hot” (alerting us about routine or trivial events) nor “too cold” (never alerting us about anything). But what constitutes “just right?” There are as many answers to this question as there are uses for Unix.

Anyhow, you don’t need me to tell you what constitutes nuisance-level reporting: if it happens, you’ll know it. You may even experience a scare or two in responding to events that set off alarms appropriately but turn out to be harmless nonetheless. Read the manual, tweak .swatchrc, and stay the course.

The other scenario, in which too little is watched for, is much harder to address, especially for the beginning system administrator. By definition, anomalous events don’t happen very frequently, so how do you anticipate how they’ll manifest themselves in the logs? My first bit of advice is to get in the habit of browsing your system logs often enough to get a feel for what the routine operation of your systems looks like.

Better still, “tail” the logs in real time. If you enter the command tail -f /var/log/messages, the last 50 lines of the system log will be printed, plus all subsequent lines.
as they’re generated, until you kill tail with a Control-c. This works for any file, even a log file that changes very rapidly.

Another good thing you can do is to “beat up on” (probe/attack) your system in one virtual console or xterm while tailing various log files in another. nmap and Nessus, which are covered in Chapter 3 (Hardening Linux), are perfect for this.

By now you may be saying, “Hey, I thought the whole reason I installed swatch was so I wouldn’t have to watch log files manually!” Wrong. Swatch minimizes, but does not eliminate, the need for us to parse log files.

Were you able to quit using your arithmetic skills after you got your first pocket calculator? No. For that matter, can you use a calculator in the first place unless you already know how to add, multiply, etc.? Definitely not. The same goes for log file parsing: you can’t tell swatch to look for things you can’t identify yourself, no more than you can ask for directions to a town whose name you’ve forgotten.

Why You Shouldn’t Configure swatch Once and Forget About It

In the same vein, I urge you to not be complacent about swatch silence. If swatch’s actions don’t fire very often, it could be that your system isn’t getting probed or misused very much, but it’s at least as likely that swatch isn’t casting its net wide enough. Continue to periodically scan through your logs manually to see if you’re missing anything, and continue to tweak .swatchrc.

Don’t forget to periodically reconsider the auditing/logging configurations of the daemons that generate log messages in the first place. Swatch won’t catch events that aren’t logged at all. Refer to the syslogd(8) manpage for general instructions on managing your syslogd daemon, and the manpages of the various things that log to syslog for specific instructions on changing the way they log events.

Resources

http://www.stanford.edu/~atkins/swatch. swatch home page. (Has links to the latest version, online manpages, etc.)

