



Bill Weinberg

Samurai Software Testing

Open source software development is oft extolled by its practitioners for its ability to deliver amazingly high quality. Free software reliability, performance and ease-of-use, community wisdom professes, comes from its deployment and use paradigm. With open source, new releases are thoroughly tested by a mix of developers and end-users not through a formal test discipline, but rather through real-world usage and highly incremental direct feedback to project developers and maintainers. For the record, I am a strong and vocal advocate of this model.

CONTEXT SWITCH

I was recently in Tokyo for a face-to-face meeting of the OSDL Mobile Linux Initiative. In between discussions of mobile telephony

shall go unnamed). In the past two years, I have faced random lock-ups, crashes linked to mounting network volumes, corruption of mailbox summaries, zombie back-end daemons, SEGFaults on changes to address book entries, glacial calendar updates and a slew of other joys I normally associate with Outlook and other malware. Who tests this stuff? Patient and persistent, I slog, hack, patch and update my way past each, dutifully reporting bugs, and keeping the faith (perhaps the real reason I haven't switched to another mailer is that other clients aren't able to import my gigabytes of archived mail and 3000+ contacts). Who tests this stuff? I guess I do.

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requirements and bites of sushi, my friend and MLI member Lefty Schlesinger entertained us with his peculiar command of Japanese. He displayed impressive fluency, more enough to get around, but all gleaned from being a Samurai film aficionado. To amuse our hosts, he hauled out a slew of *matin*-based sword-wielding, honour-bound slang. My favourite term was *tsuji-giri* - to test a new sword on unsuspecting passers-by. (*Tsuji Giri* is also the name of a Manchester-based noise-rock band).

KONTEKUSUTO SUICHO

Back in the Silicon Valley, I once again find myself plugging away at my workstation on a series of articles, white papers, and other evangelical fodder. I eat my own dog food in my everyday life: Linux desktop, OpenOffice, Apache, MySQL, Samba, Gimp, Xsane, Linux-based Wireless-G router, Linux-based mobile phone, media player - the whole shebang (can't afford a Sony Linux-based HDTV or a BMW 5 series with Linux inside, though).

When I try to get my wife and kids to use Linux, we all shudder. I cannot imagine trying to administer their desktop systems, especially when care and feeding of my own keeps me, ahem, occupied. For example, as a favour to OSDL IT, I use leading edge versions of several productivity applications, including a popular e-mail client (which

warrior, and the teachings of Zen warrior monk Aruemuesu, instruct us that we must make sacrifices for our freedom. The needs and sensibilities of mere Gumin - common villagers and townspeople - are clearly beneath us.

One day I realised that I too had become a victim of software *tsuji giri* - Samurai QA. In non-technical undertakings, I am that unsuspecting passer-by and the killer app is a shining katana arching towards my neck. But my own *kenjutsu* kicks in, and like the disguised sword master in Samurai films, I fight back. But should I have to? Must all end-users take up the sword?

In 1868 the Edo period in Japan came to an end, and three years later the Samurai class and its privileges were abolished; the end of feudalism made the Samurai irrelevant. It is now 2006. For at least five years running, analysts and free software advocates have prognosticated that this would be the year of the Linux desktop. And year after year, Linux desktop share languishes in the single digits. If Linux and open source are to remain relevant, and not destined to go the way of the Samurai, then we must engineer, and test; test early, and test often. And test, test, test, and test some more, for the common man, before we release.

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