Time for the December column again! And I gotta pick my annual holiday “best” list. Let me say here that it was no easy pick. Last year, Gibson, Stephenson, and Waldrop weren’t eligible, so that gets rid of Sterling this year. But there is a consolation: I also get to list a bonus book. But first, the books at hand.

**TWO PENGUINS**

Gagne’s keyboard must generate a lot of heat. Earlier this year there was *Moving to Linux*, and now there’s a large Business Desktop version. While there is a lot of space in this “new” book given over to material from the earlier one, there is an admirable amount of new material. I think Gagne does a really fine job. But I’m afraid that this isn’t a book for a true newbie, either. Gagne explains Samba very well, and I was thrilled by his exposition on OpenOffice, but this is not a book that can be used readily by someone with no computer background. If you’ve got some command line experience, this will be the perfect book. It comes with a Knoppix CD.

**STUTZ’ LINUX COOKBOOK**

Michael Stutz

Stutz’ Linux Cookbook has waxed since 2000, when the first edition appeared, from 402 to over 800 pages. But there’s a lot more useful stuff here. Well worth getting.

**BLACK HATS**

Branigan has been involved in high-tech forensics at Bell Labs and at Lumeta for quite a while. With High-Tech Crimes Revealed he’s produced something quite out of the ordinary: a “security” book as compelling as a whodunit. Peppering his book with anonymized anecdotes, he’s given us a gripping story.

**BUDGETING FOR SYSADMINS**

Adam Moskowitz

**THE TURING TEST**

Stuart Shieber, ed.

I would guess that 60% of the books I receive each year contain the name “Turing” at some point. Usually in the phrases “Turing complete” or “Turing test.” I would guess further that over half of those uses are irrelevant (stuck in for intellectual color) or just inappropriate. Shieber has put together a truly superb anthology concerning the “indistinguishability test” (between artifact and person).

Beginning with Descartes and La Mettrie and moving through all four of Turing’s papers, Shieber provides us with 13 essays for and against the “test,” ending with Chomsky’s “Turing on the ‘Imitation Game’” (written for this anthology in 2002). A great read.

**THE VERY BEST**

Lawrence Rosen, *Open Source Licensing*, Pearson Education.
Diomidis Spinellis, *Code Reading*, Addison-Wesley.

Last year’s “bonus” was the then-new UserFriendly book. This year it goes to cartoons again: Nitrozac and Snaggy, *The Best of the Joy of Tech*, O’Reilly.