Free World
Want to know more about BSD?

ALL **POWER** TO THE **DAEMON**

Richard Ibbotson takes a look at FreeBSD, an advanced operating system for many different architectures, and some of its fellow BSD Unix counterparts

There are no doubt many people out there who will get a bit bored of Linux and decide to try out one of the versions of BSD Unix to see what they have to offer. Those of us who have been around Free software for a long time will be aware that there are some Linux and BSD people out there who exist simply to have a go at each other. By and large this situation is thankfully something that your average computer user doesn't come across.

If you want to try one of the BSDs, for either desktop use or for that all-important firewall you need to protect your internal LAN, then feel free to go ahead and try something out. As the OpenBSD people will probably tell you Unix would seem to be about experience and knowing what to do rather than paper qualifications. The only way to learn with this software is by doing and not by going to a university.

You might well ask the question what can I do with BSD that I can't do with Linux? In fact, quite a few BSD users ask this of Linux users. BSD is generally accredited with being more useful for firewalls and security applications than Linux, although in recent times there is some doubt as to whether this is true. Linux developers have been heard to say that the BSD developers they have encountered were much too pedantic for their tastes.

Over the past two years BSD, and the X-servers that it uses, have become much more sophisticated from the point of view of desktop use. If you like to use KDE2 on your Linux desktop or notebook, then you can have the same thing on any BSD system you might want to install and use. Hardware like scanners and ADSL or ISDN cards are supported and there's lots of documentation and support from the many mailing lists for people who are having a particular problem with one or more aspects of BSD.

FreeBSD

Traditionally FreeBSD is the version that most people start out with. There is a massive pile of documentation and quite a few lists to subscribe to, so that if this is your own choice you can get the right kind of help and support delivered into your mailbox at a frightening speed. If you look at the FreeBSD Web site and compare it with the other BSD sites you will notice that the graphics and layout of the site proclaim its popularity.

Over in the States both students and academic staff are actively engaged in a passionate argument about which software to use. This can occasionally break out into a riotous assembly and FreeBSD can be frequently found at the centre of that argument.

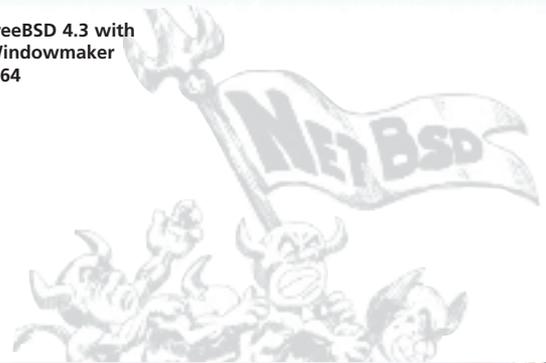## Where can I get FreeBSD from?

If you can't download FreeBSD then you can get hold of it from many other places – search the Net and you should find a supplier. The best version to get hold of is the official boxed set. This comes with an

NetBSD running KDE
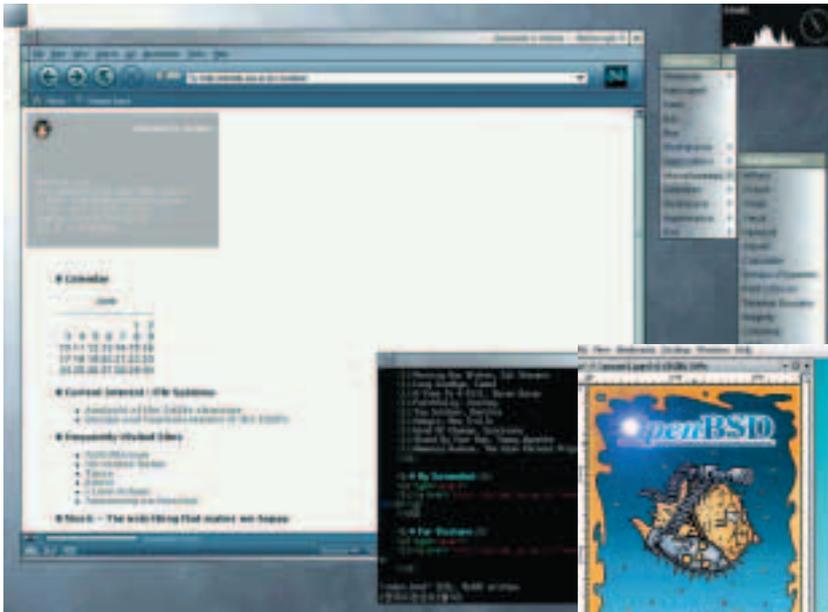
FreeBSD 4.3 with Windowmaker 0.64

excellent book entitled The Complete FreeBSD. With the book in front of you – and the large mound of documentation from the FreeBSD site – you should be able to carry out a first time configuration.

NetBSD

NetBSD appears to be very fashionable just now. It runs on most types of hardware, so if you want something like Windowmaker running on your Amiga then why not try it out? A quick look at the left-hand side of the NewBSD Web site will reveal just how many different computers you can run NetBSD on. Its clean design and advanced features make it excellent in both production and research environments.

The BSD codebase can be traced back to the early 80s at the University of California, Berkeley, and has been open to public scrutiny ever since. NetBSD continues this tradition and works ever harder to promote clean design and functionality over hype. NetBSD is being used at NASA's Numerical Aerospace Simulation facility for a reason: their main platforms are Alpha systems with lots of RAM and disk space (terabyte and up), and they need a good, stable, codebase on which they can build custom projects. NetBSD was also the first free OS to make a Y2K statement.

OpenBSD

If you are a choosy system administrator who's seen it all then you'll probably already know to use OpenBSD if you're going to use BSD at all. The authors of OpenBSD like to make sure that you know that OpenBSD has not suffered a hole in a remote install for four years. Having made it past this kind of shocking news you can then as a newbie sample the delights of the OpenBSD community first hand and try out the ample and well catered for mailing lists

which will provide you with the information you will need to produce your first working installation.

The experienced person may find a snag or two on the way but these people are catered for with some of the more advanced mailing lists. OpenBSD emphasise portability, standardisation, correctness, proactive security and integrated cryptography. The current release is OpenBSD 2.9, which started shipping 1 June 2001. OpenBSD contains OpenSSH, which supports SSH1 and SSH2!

Want to know more?

If you want to know more about some simple aspects of BSD, why not follow our newbies guide over the next few issues. Hope we see you again next month.

OpenBSD running the Gimp