Book Review: Hacking with Kali

by Steven Wierckx

Syngress has released a book called 'Hacking with Kali' aimed towards beginner and intermediate penetration testers. The goal, as they state it on the book cover, is to teach how to conduct penetration tests and access your system environment with Kali.

The book has 230 pages, this is indicative for the audience they are trying to reach. Readers should realize they will not get in in depth book an each possible topic or tool available on the Kali distribution. On the other hand a reader will expect detailed descriptions on how to set up Kali and how to use it. He will also expect to see a mix of topics covering network penetration and web application penetration techniques. The subtitle of the book is 'Practical penetration testing techniques' and this emphasizes the goal of the book, not an in depth coverage of one topic but a broad introduction aimed towards beginning and intermediate penetration testers with little or no knowledge on the Kali distribution. More seasoned penetration testers with knowledge of Kali will have very little use for this book.

Book Structure

The book is structured in 11 chapters that cover the installation and updating of the Kali distribution, the creation of a hacking lab and the penetration process, a more detailed description of each of the 5 phases of a penetration test with some tools, a chapter on reporting and some appendices such as a list of tools included in the Kali distribution.

Most of the information in this book will be valid for some time to come. Kali does update the tools in its distribution on a regular basis so the list of tools included might not be complete anymore.

Each chapter is than further divided in sub chapters and each of these is shorter than one page (omitting screenshots). This creates an easy reading atmosphere and provides 'resting points' for the reader. It is the purpose of the authors that a reader will be using a computer while reading the book, the sub chapter swill also facilitate this since you do not need to search for the line in a text where you stopped before doing an exercise. This type of text formatting is common in good technical books since they are not meant to be read like a novel but rather like a school syllabus.

The book is in black and white but this does not diminish the usefulness or readability of screenshots. Each chapter start is clearly marked and both the font and font size are easy to read.
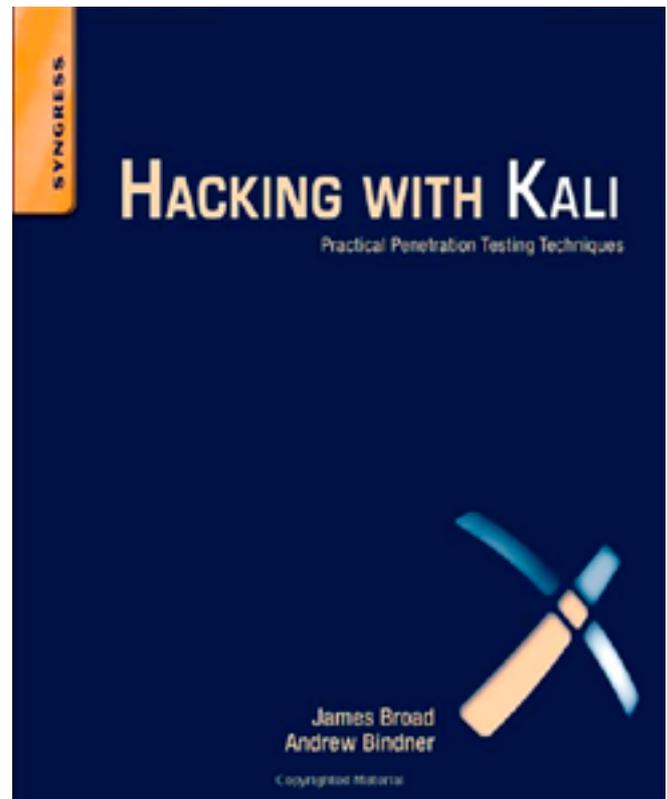
Content

The first chapter in the book consists of only a couple of pages and clearly describes the target audience and some glossary terms used throughout the book.

The second chapter handles the installation of the Kali distribution using many screenshots. The third and fourth chapters cover the topic of patching and updating your Kali system and tools along with the configuration of the services you might need such as FTP and Web servers. The fifth chapter teacher the reader how to set up a hacking lab as a playground to hone their skills.

These first five chapters are really important for novice users and the authors take the time to explain a lot of details such as the use of apt to keep your system up to date and install additional software. Readers with sufficient linux experience might skim through these chapters or skip them all together and go to chapter six where the penetration test process is explained.

The penetration test process is divided into 5 chapters and each will be handled in more detail while showing some tools in the next five chapters.

Throughout all these chapters there is always a lot of information that covers just that little more than what is needed to just use Kali for a task, it is these little pieces of information that will be a goldmine for beginners. A good example is the fourth chapter on the configuration of Kali, it contains a subsection on the basics of networking where things like private addressing and default gateways are clearly explained. Most other beginners books would refer to other books or the internet for this information or omit it completely.

Conclusion

This book was well written and covers some subjects one would not immediately expect in a beginners book (e.g. the installation of Kali on an SD card, how to use and create tarballs). A starting penetration tester would profit greatly from reading this book just keep in mind you are supposed to be using a computer alongside the book, this is not a theoretical but rather a practical book. After reading this book the penetration tester will have a fairly good idea on where his strengths and weaknesses lie and he could then buy books or training to cover exactly those weaknesses.

About the Author
Steven Wierckx is currently working as Security Tester for Polteq (www.polteq. com), he specializes in web application security and keeps a security related blog (www.ihackforfun.eu). Steven has 15 years of experience working in IT as an software analyst, developer and tester and lives in Belgium.