This is the long-awaited 3rd Edition of Tanenbaums classic book on computer networking. The finest network engineer I know (who was stolen from my previous employer by developers of IPv6) swears by this book, and it is arguably the best single resource for gaining a good technical understanding of modern networking in the mid 1990s. Very Highly Recommended.

I've been teaching Intro to Networking for 7 years (half electrical engineering and half computer science students). I'm also a practicing network engineer in satellite (and ground) communications (15 years experience). Until this year (2001) I used Tanenbaum to teach my graduate level course, but this year I think I may have to abandon him. On the plus side the book is clearly written, well illustrated, combines both theory and practice, and is very well organized. I strongly endorse the layered approach both for teaching and for practice. On the negative side is Tanenbaums relatively poorly written physical layer. He also does not have a consistent approach to networking performance.

But the biggest problem now is that since 1996, when this book was last updated, there has been a major shift due to the convergence of the telecommunications and computer networking (Voice over IP). Also the development of fiber optics has become a major factor. Finally, the convergence of wireless with the Internet is rapidly taking shape. These changes are touched on by parts of this book, but these changes are more than mere additions. They affect the fundamental engineering approaches used by network engineers. For example, statistical traffic models now cannot be ignored, availability (always a major topic in telecomm) must now be covered, the full implications of mixed traffic types must now be explored, multiplexing needs greater attention, scheduling is now essential, etc. Although it is NOT obvious that commercial voice will merge with the Internet, it is obvious that the future is VoIP (lots of implementation approaches).
Tanenbaum still has a lot to offer. No other textbook is as well organized. This is the first duty of an author: to organize the topic. For example, I agree with Tanenbaums putting ATM at the network layer even though in practice it is treated as a data link protocol (ATM obviously has a limited future).

My recommendation to someone considering this textbook is that there is no killer-textbook in this area. If Tanenbaum updated this book, he could (in my est) ascend to the position. For now this should be supplemented with more up-to-date textbooks. Perhaps I'll consign my students to two textbooks this year (torturous), but for sure they need supplemental material. I refuse to allow my students to enter the networking world unprepared. The networking world is changing!

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