Viewing System Messages and Logs

Linux maintains several system logs that help you administer a Linux system by informing you of important events. Probably the most important log is the file `/var/log/messages`, which records a variety of events, including system error messages, system startups, and system shutdowns. Like most other Linux files, the file contains ASCII text, so you can view it with a text editor or the text processing commands described in **Chapter 13**.

A special command, **dmesg**, makes it easy to view the log messages related to the most recent system startup. If your system is behaving unusually, use **dmesg** to quickly see if something went wrong during the system startup sequence. Of course, you must have some way of determining what's usual and unusual among the many messages emitted during system startup. The best way to do so is to print the output of the **dmesg** command and keep it on hand for comparison with suspicious output. If your system has an attached printer, you can print the output of **dmesg** by entering the following command:

```
dmesg | lpr
```

Other logs found in the `/var/log` directory include:

apache
directory that contains two log files pertaining to the Apache web server, `access.log` and `error.log`.

exim
A directory that contains several log files pertaining to the **exim** mail transfer agent.

nmb and smb

Files that contain log entries pertaining to Samba, the Microsoft-compatible networking server.

ppp.log
A file the contains log entries pertaining to PPP.