HugeTLB Improvement to Reduce Post-Boot Allocation Failures

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1 Preamble

This research was inspired by many frustrated attempts to utilize the excellent huge page facilities of the Linux kernel during runtime. Huge pages are a mechanism whereby the Linux kernel can allocate memory not in 4kb pages (or whatever your distribution uses) but page sizes ranging from many megabytes to a gigabyte or more (though we touch only on the megabyte sized pages in this paper). This gives a variety of advantages, one of the most important being a reduction in the number of page entries that the kernel must manage for your executable. This can, for example, significantly increase the speed of large mmaps and munmaps.

Most of the current use cases and documentation stipulate that you should only attempt to allocate huge pages immediately after boot, in order to avoid (very common) failures due to memory fragmentation and memory use by other executables. However this is not always a convenient option and in some situations (such as real time systems with uptime requirements) it is basically untenable.

Therefore, this paper will describe a method whereby the Linux kernel can be improved to more robustly allocate huge pages during runtime, even when other applications have consumed a significant amount of available memory.

2 Amble

There are two primary causes of hugepage allocation failure. In order to illuminate them and discuss the solution we will describe the original algorithm here:

```
967
    static int alloc_fresh_huge_page(struct hstate *h, nodemask_t *nodes_allowed)
968
969
             struct page *page;
970
             int nr_nodes, node;
971
             int ret = 0;
972
973
             for_each_node_mask_to_alloc(h, nr_nodes, node, nodes_allowed) {
974
                      page = alloc_fresh_huge_page_node(h, node);
975
                      if (page) {
976
                              ret = 1;
977
                              break;
978
                      }
             }
979
980
             if (ret)
981
982
                      count_vm_event(HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC);
983
             else
984
                      count_vm_event(HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_FAIL);
985
986
             return ret;
987
    }
```

As originally written, the algorithm iterates over the given allowed nodes, calling alloc_fresh_huge_page_node which eventually calls into __alloc_pages_nodemask, where the kernel employs a variety of tools to attempt to gather enough memory to fulfill the request from this exact node.

 \dots set_max_huge_pages \dots

```
1574
                       spin_unlock(&hugetlb_lock);
1575
                       if (hstate_is_gigantic(h))
                               ret = alloc_fresh_gigantic_page(h, nodes_allowed);
1576
1577
                       else
                               ret = alloc_fresh_huge_page(h, nodes_allowed);
1578
1579
                       spin_lock(&hugetlb_lock);
1580
                       if (!ret)
1581
                               goto out;
```

 \dots set_max_huge_pages \dots

set_max_huge_pages is called by the kernel to allocate the total requested

number of pages. Note that if we fail even a single call of alloc_fresh_huge_page, we immediately end the attempt to allocate. This can sometimes be worked around by asking the kernel repeatedly to allocate the number of pages, but the allocation will be biased towards the initial nodes searched since we iterate linearly, and eventually they will be exhausted. A situation will quickly arise where the allocation of further huge pages is not limited by available memory but instead by specific nodes which cannot be be passed over by the allocation algorithm. Additionally, the code in page_alloc.c primarily checks the freelist and then eventually wakes the kswapds. However if the system is under load, this is unlikely to be able to provide enough to fulfill a significant request.

3 Mosey

To demonstrate the issues with the original algorithm, as above, we provide two figures which describe six different scenarios for the default and new allocation method (hereafter called aggressive). The scenarios are a set of configuration options for the test run in question, where a test run is a certan amount of setup and then an allocation request of the kernel. All scenarios were run directly after a complete reboot, against a 64-bit 3.10 linux kernel¹. The figures are of the average of 10 runs². These scenarios are encoded as the first letter of each option, followed by a number, and are as follows:

- (a)ggressive: Whether to use aggressive alloc.
- (s)et: The number of pages to allocate. In all of our tests this number was 500, due to the fact that it was near the maximum suppliable by the system³ and thus demonstrated the problems with large requests best.
- (g)rab: Whether to cause the test application to allocate memory (to disrupt hugepage allocation), and how much if so. 0 means none was allocated. This allocation is done in a series of blocks, rather than in one large request, in order to spread the memory allocations to a variety of nodes and to better simulate the real memory allocation patterns of an application.
- (i)terations: How many times the test application should attempt to set the number of huge pages. In all test runs this was 10, as it proved sufficient for demonstrating performance.
- (r)eset: Whether to re-set the number of hugepages to 0 after each iteration. 0 means do not reset. We ran 4 scenarios which reset and 2 which did not reset. In many real world scenarios an application making a hugepage request that fails will simply want to back off the allocation and attempt

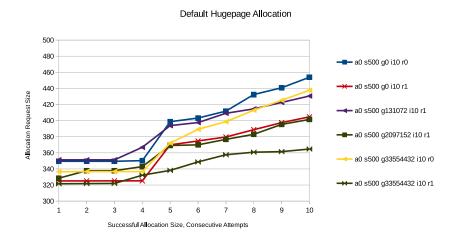
 $^{^{1}{\}rm Linux}$ 3.10.0-327.4.5.el
7.x86_64.debug #22 SMP x86_64 GNU/Linux

 $^{^2} Please see results_test_app/aggr and results_test_app/nonaggr in the GitHub repo for total test run printouts$

³See Appendix B for system memory information.

it again later, as it needs the complete request to be fulfilled. However it is also possible that the application will be able to incrementally make use of the hugepages or will be designed to re-request until the allocation is fulfilled, which is likely a necessary choice when requesting large allocations even with these changes. Not resetting the hugepages significantly eases the difficulty of fulfilling the allocation request for the kernel, while resetting demonstrates the efficacy of an intermittent allocation workload.

We use these parameters to define our tests in order to simulate a variety of real world use cases.



As this chart shows, the default allocation strategy generally fails, on average, to fulfill a large huge page request at runtime. There are three key points on the graph to examine. The first is the initial allocation which for all attempts achieved between 320 and 350 pages of the 500 requested. The next key point is the inflection that occurs at attempt 3 and 4, when all except the most stringent scenario achieved a slightly higher allocation. However, none pass the 400 page mark, and over the course of the next four attempts most barely improve. Much of this improvement can be attributed to anonymous huge pages slowly aggregating all of the memory we are requesting and then re-supplying it to us every time we ask for an allocation. The one scenario that has not made dramatic improvements is the the g33445532 r1, which is the most demanding of the kernel. The third key point is the final allocation attempt. At this juncture three scenarios are at about 450 pages (two of which are r0), having improved by roughly 10 pages or so each attempt, though none have completely fulfilled the request. g33554432 r0 has slowly accumulated more pages but is only marginally greater than it was six attempts ago, and the two remaining have finally achieved about 400, roughly the same as the 3 most successful scenarios 6 attempts ago. One thing to note is that past success is a strong predictor of future success, as the graph demonstrates. In summary, none of these scenarios averaged complete success, and half were at only 400 out of 500 pages after 10 consecutive allocation attemps. Total improvement for the scenarios was capped at roughly 150 pages. Now that we have examined the default scenarios, we will discuss the proposed changes and show the results of the identical tests run against them.

4 Wander

There are two important changes to the alloc_fresh_huge_page algorithm. First, if we completely fail to allocate any pages, we call try_to_free_pages (freeing up pages on that node which can be swapped out). If this succeeds, we will once again attempt to allocate on this node. This is important because often allocation on a node is blocked by pages that are still in memory but do not need to be, i.e., they can be swapped out immediately by the kernel. This will effect the performance of other applications on the system but it still follows the default kernel policy (in our case LRU) and therefore disruption should be relatively minimal.

```
static unsigned int alloc_fresh_huge_page(struct hstate *h, nodemask_t *nodes_al
1014
1015
         struct page *page = NULL;
1016
         int nr_nodes, node, ret = 0, num_nodes = 0;
1017
         for_each_node_mask_to_alloc(h, nr_nodes, node, nodes_allowed) {
1018
              num\_nodes++;
1019
1020
              page = alloc_fresh_huge_page_node(h, node);
1021
              if (page) {
1022
                  goto out;
1023
              }
1024
         }
1025
1026
         if (!hugepages_aggressive_alloc) {
1027
              goto out;
1028
         for_each_node_mask_to_alloc(h, nr_nodes, node, nodes_allowed) {
1029
              gfp_t gfp_mask = htlb_alloc_mask | _GFP_COMP | _GFP_THISNODE |
1030
                      __GFP_REPEAT | _GFP_NOWARN;
1031
1032
              struct zonelist *zonelist = node_zonelist(node, gfp_mask);
1033
              if (try_to_free_pages(zonelist, h->order, gfp_mask, nodes_allowed) > 0)
1034
1035
                  page = alloc_fresh_huge_page_node(h, node);
1036
                  if (page) {
1037
                      count_vm_event(HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_RETRY_SUCCESS);
1038
                      break;
1039
1040
                  count_vm_event (HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_RETRY_FAIL);
1041
              }
1042
         }
1043
      out:
1044
         if (page) {
1045
              count_vm_event (HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC);
1046
              ret = 1;
1047
         } else {
1048
              count_vm_event(HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_FAIL);
              ret = 0;
1049
1050
1051
         return ret;
1052
```

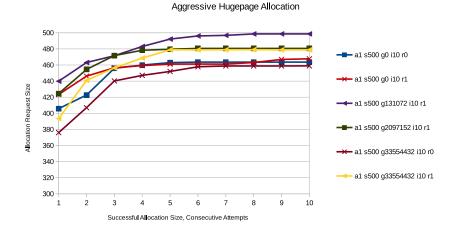
Second, if we succeed in freeing pages then we re-attempt the allocation on that node. Additionally, we made a change to the calling algorithm, **set_max_huge_pages**, where we will retry until either we succeed in fulfilling the allocation request or we fail at allocating any huge pages twice in a row. Technically we could

simply attempt to allocate until there are no available pages left at all, and this would guarantee completion of the request if it is possible, however we decided to make a compromise between efficacy and hogging kernel runtime. An even more relaxed failure tolerance would likely yield even better results but increase the kernel contention significantly.

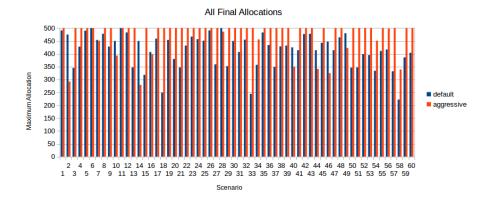
```
1643
              spin_unlock(&hugetlb_lock);
1644
              if (hstate_is_gigantic(h)) {
                                ret = alloc_fresh_gigantic_page(h, nodes_allowed);
1645
1646
              } else {
1647
                                ret = alloc_fresh_huge_page(h, nodes_allowed);
1648
1649
              spin_lock(&hugetlb_lock);
              if (hstate_is_gigantic(h) || !hugepages_aggressive_alloc) {
1650
1651
                  if (!ret)
1652
                       goto out;
1653
              } else {
1654
                  /* If two successive allocs failed, bail */
1655
                  if (last_ret == 0)  {
1656
                       if (!ret) {
                           count_vm_event(HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_SUBSEQ_FAIL);
1657
1658
                           goto out;
1659
                       } else {
1660
                           count_vm_event (HTLB_BUDDY_PGALLOC_SUBSEQ_SUCCESS);
1661
1662
1663
                  last_ret = ret;
1664
              }
```

The next chart shows the difference in success rates for this new strategy. On average, the initial allocation is more than 100 pages higher for all scenarios. Rather than taking 4 consecutive attempts to reliably achieve more than the initial allocation, by the 3rd attempt all scenarios are within 10 pages of their maximum. As can be seen, though only one scenario achieves the total of 500, all scenarios achieve significantly higher allocations significantly faster, with all scenarios above 460 pages at final attempt, which was not achieved by even the least stringent default scenario. Additionally, unlike the default strategy, the scenario configuration had significantly less impact on the success of the allocation, because the aggressive alloc is able to work around large memory allocation and page resets significantly better. Gathered statistics⁴ demonstrate the importance of both of the fault tolerance and retry changes we introduced.

⁴Please see Appendix A



Next, we present a chart of all scenarios' last result to compare ultimate efficacy. Note that scenarios can achieve a maximum result much sooner than the final attempt and in all such cases continued to allocate the maximum number until the end of the scenario. Each column of the chart is the exact same scenario's final result for default and aggressive allocations, for all scenarios run (i.e., 10 runs of each scenario configuration). 46 of 50 of the aggressive scenarios actually completed the 500 page request, but the averages in the charts are lowered by test runs where multiple consecutive nodes are both full and lack enough freeable pages. Conversely, only 3 of 50 the default scenarios achieved 500 pages allocated. Of note is that almost all scenarios for both aggressive and default had at least one test run where the final total failed to achieve a significant improvement over its the initial attempted allocation. We will discuss a potential solution to this issue in Future Works.



5 Future Works

The one major algorithmic change that could yield even better results than obtained is modifying **set_max_huge_pages** further. Two different strategies could be employed. First, we could avoid the linear search and instead introduce a progressive or randomized starting node choice. This would allow us to eventually overcome a large series of nodes all of which are unusable, however it would place the burden on the requestor to re-ask enough times to fulfill the request. Instead of this, we could make **set_max_huge_pages** simply skip over unusable nodes until the allocation is completed or it has judged that all suitable nodes are exhausted. The drawback to this strategy is that iterating over all nodes is a very lengthy process, and similarly any method to determine an appropriate level of 'exhaustion' could prove laborious if it is not simply arbitrary. However either of these would likely yield even better results than the simple changes we propose and are worth investigating.

6 Postamble

In summary, we have presented a use case for the hugetlb mechanism of the kernel where the current implementation is not able to meet the required needs, made changes to significantly increase the likelihood of success and subsequently demonstrated their efficacy. To do so, we have collected and analyzed data regarding both the current implementation and the aggressive implementation. We show that the new strategy is unequivocally superior in its ability to fulfill large hugepage allocation requests. We have examined the kernel changes that yielded the results and made suggestions for what could be pursued next. Finally, all data and code used for this paper is available at the public github repository (https://github.com/rivenwyrm/htlb_project).

A Appendix A: Raw Data

```
./results_test_app/nonaggr/
a0 s500 g0 i10 r0,337,337,337,337,388,388,388,413,450,491,
  s500 g0 i10 r0,332,332,332,332,397,410,422,460,462,475,
a0
  s500 g0 i10 r0,340,340,340,340,398,398,398,428,428,428,
  s500 g0 i10 r0,335,335,335,335,395,395,426,474,479,490,
  s500
       g0 i10 r0,465,465,465,473,491,498,498,500,500,500
  s500
       g0 i10 r0,334,334,334,334,399,413,429,449,454,454,
       g0 i10 r0,349,349,349,349,404,414,414,444,444,478,
       g0 i10 r0,329,329,329,329,382,382,393,399,399,428,
a0
  s500
  s500
       g0 i10 r0,331,331,331,331,389,389,405,412,447,450,
       g0 i10 r1,356,356,356,356,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500
       g0 i10 r1,333,333,333,333,389,391,391,425,448,483,
       g0 i10 r1,345,345,345,345,345,347,347,347,347,347,
  s500
       g0 i10 r1,325,325,325,325,380,380,399,421,450,450.
  s500
       g0 i10 r1,327,327,327,327,376,376,395,403,403,407,
  s500
       g0 i10 r1,357,357,357,357,409,409,421,428,435,459,
a0
       g0 i10 r1,248,248,249,249,249,249,249,249,249,249,249.
  s500
  s500 g0 i10 r1,327,327,327,327,381,425,425,444,445,454.
  s500 g0 i10 r1,315,315,315,315,352,352,352,352,380,380,
       s500
a0
       g131072 i10 r1,353,353,353,353,404,404,423,423,432,432,
a0
  s500
  s500 	ext{ g} 131072 	ext{ i} 10 	ext{ r} 1,342,342,342,342,393,406,426,440,462,467,
       g131072 i10 r1,358,358,358,358,418,418,450,454,457,457,
a0
       g131072 i10 r1,350,350,350,350,403,403,412,423,433,451.
  s500 	ext{ g} 131072 	ext{ i} 10 	ext{ r} 1,350,350,350,350,403,409,413,434,452,465,491.
a.0
  s500 	ext{ g} 131072 	ext{ i} 10 	ext{ r} 1,358,358,358,358,359,359,359,359,359,359,359
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,355,355,355,406,451,471,475,480,481,500,
  s500
       g131072 i10 r1,350,350,350,350,351,352,352,352,352,352,352
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,350,350,350,402,403,403,413,416,438,450.
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,328,328,328,328,329,329,330,330,394,407.
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,353,353,353,353,400,400,416,441,444,455,
a0
  s500
       s500 	ext{ } g2097152 	ext{ } i10 	ext{ } r1,350,350,350,401,422,422,422,422,447,480,483,
  s500 	ext{ } g2097152 	ext{ } i10 	ext{ } r1,360,360,360,360,405,405,405,405,405,405,434.
a0
       g2097152 i10 r1,344,344,344,344,344,350,349,349,349,349
  s500
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,342,342,342,342,391,391,415,422,423,429.
  s500 \ g2097152 \ i10 \ r1 \,, 354 \,, 354 \,, 354 \,, 354 \,, 405 \,, 405 \,, 418 \,, 424 \,, 432 \,, 432 \,,
a0
  s500 	ext{ } g2097152 	ext{ } i10 	ext{ } r1,348,348,348,348,396,396,411,411,425,425,
a0
  s500
       g33554432 i10 r0,334,334,334,334,385,392,399,404,412,414
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,326,326,326,326,378,387,398,427,465,477.
```

```
a0 s500 g33554432 i10 r0,340,341,341,341,397,407,407,439,465,478,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,334,334,334,334,381,403,403,403,406,414
  s500 \quad g33554432 \quad i10 \quad r0,331,331,331,331,377,390,390,404,427,443,
  s500
      g33554432 i10 r0,341,341,341,341,343,386,406,413,436,447,
a0
  s500
      g33554432 i10 r0,343,343,343,343,343,392,401,404,407,414,
a0
      g33554432 i10 r0,333,333,333,333,379,391,427,452,452,464,
      g33554432 i10 r0,340,340,340,340,392,398,410,437,437,480,
a0
a0
  s500
      a0
  s500
      g33554432 i10 r1,344,344,344,344,345,346,347,347,347,347,347
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,333,333,333,333,377,377,389,398,398,399,
  s500
      g33554432 i10 r1,334,334,334,334,335,372,377,382,382,395,
  s500
      s500 g33554432 i10 r1,340,340,340,389,393,393,402,411,411,411,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,329,329,329,375,384,384,395,395,402,417,
  a0
      s500 g33554432 i10 r1,316,316,316,316,317,372,374,383,383,386,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,343,343,343,343,343,355,404,404,404,404,404
./results_test_app/aggr/
  s500
      g0 i10 r0,428,431,488,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g0 i10 r0,442,493,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
      g0 i10 r0,410,447,468,469,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500
  s500
      g0 i10 r0,487,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g0 i10 r0,344,344,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g0 i10 r0,382,409,418,445,445,451,451,451,451,451,451,
      g0 i10 r0,479,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500
  s500
      g0 i10 r0,402,418,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
      a1
  s500
  s500
      g0 i10 r1,476,499,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g0 i10 r1,437,478,492,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
      s500
      g0 i10 r1,413,441,477,480,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
      g0 i10 r1,395,398,398,398,398,399,398,399,398,398,
  s500
  s500 g0 i10 r1,435,491,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g0 i10 r1,462,485,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
      g0 i10 r1,425,434,434,435,434,434,434,453,492,500,
  s500
      g0\ i10\ r1\,,412\,,457\,,486\,,500\,,500\,,500\,,500\,,500\,,500\,,500\,
  s500
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,411,467,473,480,484,484,484,500,500,500,
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,495,498,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
a1
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,431,438,473,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,426,447,447,499,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,458,488,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
```

```
a1 s500 g131072 i10 r1,357,357,357,357,441,477,484,486,486,486,
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,445,490,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g131072 i10 r1,426,446,465,494,497,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,400,415,442,483,490,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,415,451,495,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,397,440,455,456,456,456,456,456,456,456,456,
a1
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,399,459,476,494,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
a1
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,451,499,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,438,454,499,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,456,488,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g2097152 i10 r1,439,489,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,411,454,483,483,488,490,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,392,431,437,443,459,500,500,500,500,500,500
a.1
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,430,492,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,433,445,499,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,322,324,325,325,325,325,325,325,325,325,325
  s500
       g33554432 i10 r0,414,441,471,479,495,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,371,464,493,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,386,410,420,420,422,422,422,422,422,423
a1
  s500 g33554432 i10 r0,260,268,433,480,490,500,500,500,500,500,500,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,338,434,477,480,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,326,439,464,486,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,407,437,464,463,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 	ext{ } g33554432 	ext{ } i10 	ext{ } r1,416,439,452,451,451,451,451,452,452,451,451,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,415,490,492,493,498,498,498,499,498,498,
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,428,466,485,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,
a1
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,337,338,338,339,340,339,339,339,339,339,339
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,403,434,436,474,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
  s500 g33554432 i10 r1,406,432,456,500,500,500,500,500,500,500,500
```

B Appendix B: Memory Information

MemTotal: 1621960 kB ${\bf MemFree:}$ 514528 kB MemAvailable: 871008 kB Buffers: 752 kB452596 kBCached: SwapCached: 0 kBActive: 485364 kB376344 kB Inactive: Active (anon): 409100 kB Inactive (anon): 9068 kB

Active(file):	76264	kΒ	
Inactive (file):	367276	kB	
Unevictable:	0	kB	
Mlocked:	0	kB	
SwapTotal:	2097148	kB	
SwapFree:	2097148	kB	
Dirty:	8	kB	
Writeback:	0	kB	
AnonPages:	408384	kB	
Mapped:	97640	kB	
Shmem:	9808	kB	
Slab:	133312	kB	
SReclaimable:	51128	kB	
SUnreclaim:	82184	kB	
KernelStack:	11168	kB	
PageTables:	20824	kB	
$NFS_Unstable:$	0	kB	
Bounce:	0	kB	
WritebackTmp:	0	kB	
CommitLimit:	2908128	kB	
$Committed_AS:$	2073504	kB	
VmallocTotal:	343597383	367	kΒ
V malloc Used:	423048	kB	
Vmalloc C hunk:	343593031	168	kΒ
Hardware Corrupte	ed: 0	kB	
An on Huge Pages:	118784	kB	
$HugePages_Total:$	0		
$Huge Pages_Free:$	0		
$HugePages_Rsvd:$	0		
$Huge Pages_Surp:$	0		
Hugepagesize:	2048	kB	
DirectMap4k:	100224	kB	
DirectMap2M:	1996800	kB	
DirectMap1G:	0	kB	