

Problem with login/logout freezes (solved myself)

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FYI,

I run Debian Sarge on a P4 Dell Dimension 8400 workstation. I use a self-compiled kernel and the proprietary ATI driver for my X300SE video card. I also have an older machine (HP Pavilion 8766C) with proprietary NVidia drivers for the onboard Vanta dinosaur.

On my older machine I had set up 2 user accounts, one for everyday usage and another for more serious work which I want to protect from loss in case of internet security problems. This worked well, though creating the new account revealed a few problems with Debian I wouldn't have known about otherwise: using the "Cursor" font in Sarge causes 'nautilus' to crash; and the 'esd' sound daemon randomly fails to shut down when logging out, preventing the next user from being able to use sound. (The fixes are: don't use the "Cursor" font with Sarge, and kill the 'esd' process and login again.)

On my new machine today, I was setting up that second account and copying files via NFS so that I can reconfigure the old machine for other uses. I discovered that switching between user accounts would cause Debian freeze during a logout — the machine was unresponsive to the keyboard except for a Ctl-Alt-Delete shutdown. (Several times even that failed, forcing me to use the dreaded power button, resulting in an 'fsck' cycle on reboot.)

Googling for clues, I found references to a 'gdm' configuration option that forces the X server to shutdown and restart at a user logout, instead of reusing the same X server instance. That has cured my problem: I can now do as many logout/login cycles as I want without problems.

I don't know what part of the system is failing — my guess is that it is a problem with the proprietary video driver — but because I'm using a tainted kernel there is no point in reporting this as a bug using the BTS. If anyone out there ever has the same problem edit this file:

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/etc/gdm/gdm.conf
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and look for a setting called "AlwaysRestartServer" and set it to "true". It helped in my case, but YMMV. If you're having a similar problem it's worth a try, though.

HTH,
Dave W.

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