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Why does man print “gimme gimme gimme” at 00:30?






Get started


We've noticed that some of our automatic tests fail when they run at 00:30 but work fine the rest of the day. They fail with the message "gimme gimme gimme" in stderr, which wasn't expected. Why are we getting this output?

/ date / man

edited 22 hours ago

Jeff Schaller20.9k 8 32 70

asked yesterday

Jaroslav Kucera1,330 4 5 17

1

Linking in: unix.stackexchange.com/questions/226716/... – Jeff Schaller yesterday

14

I don't get it. Why does your test script call man where it should fail? – Joshua yesterday

6

@Joshua Because we wanted the "manpath" - 'man -w'. See the answer. – Jaroslav Kucera 23 hours ago

18

for the sake of history, why do you need to do a 'man -w' every minutes? what are you really testing? – Olivier Dulac 6 hours ago

5

@OlivierDulac It's being triggered just once in the test. We've rearranged the order of tests and suddenly this error apeared as it was triggered at 00:30... – Jaroslav Kucera 4 hours ago

2 Answers

er, that was my fault, I suggested it. Sorry.

Pretty much the whole story is in the commit. The maintainer of man is a good friend of mine, and one day six years ago I jokingly said to him that if you invoke man after midnight it should print "gimme gimme gimme", because of the Abba song called "Gimme gimme gimme a man after midnight":


<https://twitter.com/marnanel/status/132280557190119424>

Well, he did actually put it in, a few people were amused to discover it, and we mostly forgot about it until today.


I can't speak for Col, obviously, but I didn't expect this ever to cause any problems: what sort of test would break on parsing the output of man with no page specified? I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that one turned up eventually, but it did take six years.

(The commit message calls me Thomas, which is my legal first name though I don't use it online much.)

edited 15 hours ago

Marnanel Thurman306 1 2 5

answered 16 hours ago

Jaroslav Kucera1,330 4 5 17

55

I have seen many brilliant and great answers across many exchange networks over the couple of years I've been on here. But this, this is pure gold and will be #1 forever. A coworker of mine loves to troll. I can't wait to show him this one tomorrow! – DrZoo 10 hours ago

56

You always break someone's workflow: xkcd.com/1172 – YSC 7 hours ago

78

Oops! It was never meant to affect non-error cases. I didn't take account of this when I implemented git.savannah.gnu.org/cgiit/man-db.git/commit/... Fixed in master: git.savannah.gnu.org/cgiit/man-db.git/commit/... – Colin Watson 6 hours ago

15

@ColinWatson Awesome gag! :) Still, it should be an example to the open-source community about why undocumented features are an obstacle to professionalism. Not because they're inherently bad, but because they're untested and unmaintainable, even by the original author. It's something I've occasionally had to cover at review - however cool this little quirk is, some poor bastard is going to have to be maintaining this code in 5 years time, and it may not be you; or even worse, it *may* be you, and you get to reap the consequences... – Graham 6 hours ago

52

@Graham - a gag has costs. But perhaps it has benefits too - such as retaining some sanity in the daily grind. I think requiring humorlessness is too steep a price to pay just to avoid a few bugs. – Eamon Nerbonne 3 hours ago





Get started

This is an easter egg in `man`. When you run `man` without specifying the page or with `-w`, it outputs "gimme gimme gimme" to stderr, but only at 00:30:

```
# date +%T -s "00:30:00"
00:30:00
# man -w
gimme gimme gimme
/usr/local/share/man:/usr/share/man:/usr/man
```

The exit code is always 0.

The correct output should always be:

```
# man -w
/usr/local/share/man:/usr/share/man:/usr/man
# echo $?
0
# man
What manual page do you want?
# echo $?
1
```

The string "gimme gimme gimme" can be found in RHEL, OpenSUSE, Fedora, Debian and probably more, so it's not really distro specific. You can `grep` your `man` binary to verify.


This code is responsible for the output, added by this commit:

```
src/man.c:1167- if (first_arg == argc) {
src/man.c:1168-     /*
http://twitter.com/#!/marnanel/status/132280557190119424 */
src/man.c:1169-     time_t now = time (NULL);
src/man.c:1170-     struct tm *localnow = localtime (&now);
src/man.c:1171-     if (localnow &&
src/man.c:1172-         localnow->tm_hour == 0 && localnow->tm_min == 30)
src/man.c:1173:         fprintf (stderr, "gimme gimme gimme\n");
```


I have contacted RHEL support about this issue.

The string comes from well known ABBA song Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight).

edited 19 hours ago

Stephen Kitt97.1k 14 182 239

answered yesterday

Jaroslav Kucera1,330 4 5 17

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On platforms with `faketime` available you can try this without even needing to change the system time: `faketime '00:30:00' man` (Debian 8). – roaima yesterday

1

Other such: unix.stackexchange.com/questions/767 unix.stackexchange.com/questions/92185 unix.stackexchange.com/questions/224481 unix.stackexchange.com/questions/150121 – JdeBP yesterday

10

Kinda hilarious and annoying at the same time. Confirmed on Manjaro (Arch) also. `strings $(readlink -f $(which man)) | grep gimme` – mjb2kmn 21 hours ago

2

@rrauenza There is the buzilla ticket: bugzilla.redhat.com/show_bug.cgi?id=1515352 – Jaroslav Kucera 9 hours ago

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The author has now tightened the easter egg to only run on `man`, not `man -w`: git.savannah.nongnu.org/cgiit/man-db.git/commit/src/... and Colin's comment on Marnanel's confessio"Wanswer. – Martijn Pieters 6 hours ago

protected by GAD3R 55 mins ago

Thank you for your interest in this question. Because it has attracted low-quality or spam answers that had to be removed, posting an answer now requires 10 reputation on this site (the association bonus does not count).

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