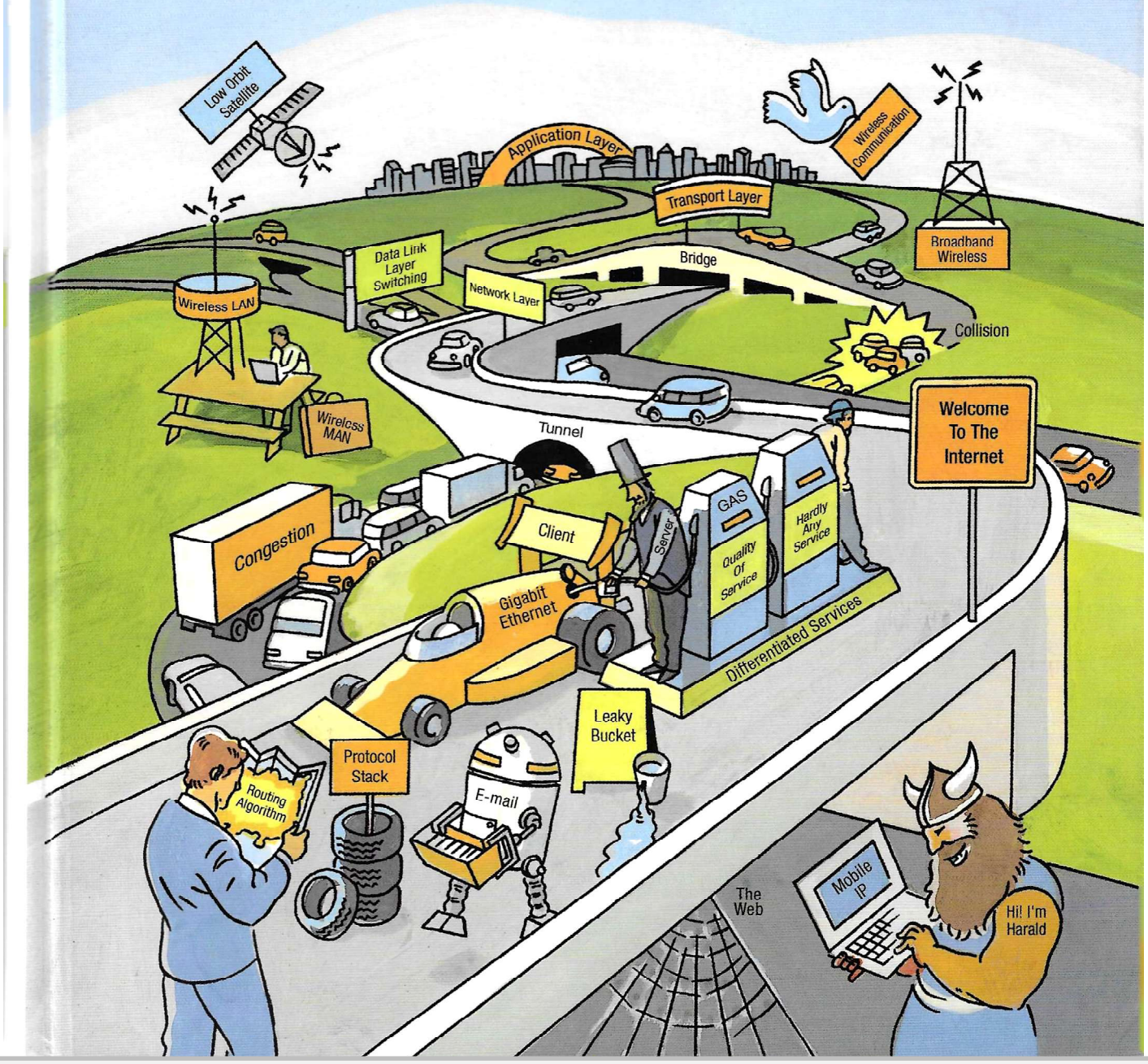
FOURTH EDITION

Computer Networks

ANDREW S. TANENBAUM



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ISBN 0-13-066102-3

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Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Prentice Hall PTR
Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458
www.phptr.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tanenbaum, Andrew S.
Computer networks / Andrew S. Tanenbaum.--4th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-13-066102-3
1. Computer networks. I. Title.
TK5105.5 .T36 2002
004.6--dc21 2002029263

Editorial/production supervision: *Patti Guerrieri*
Cover design director: *Jerry Votta*
Cover designer: *Anthony Gemmellaro*
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Interior graphics: *Hadel Studio*
Typesetting: *Andrew S. Tanenbaum*
Manufacturing buyer: *Maura Zaldivar*
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Marketing manager: *Dan DePasquale*

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Publishing as Prentice Hall PTR
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-13-066102-3

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Pearson Education Australia PTY, Limited
Pearson Education Singapore, Pte. Ltd.
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Although this book primarily focuses on networks, many of the topics are also important in distributed systems. For more information about distributed systems, see (Tanenbaum and Van Steen, 2002).

1.1 USES OF COMPUTER NETWORKS

Before we start to examine the technical issues in detail, it is worth devoting some time to pointing out why people are interested in computer networks and what they can be used for. After all, if nobody were interested in computer networks, few of them would be built. We will start with traditional uses at companies and for individuals and then move on to recent developments regarding mobile users and home networking.

1.1.1 Business Applications

Many companies have a substantial number of computers. For example, a company may have separate computers to monitor production, keep track of inventories, and do the payroll. Initially, each of these computers may have worked in isolation from the others, but at some point, management may have decided to connect them to be able to extract and correlate information about the entire company.

Put in slightly more general form, the issue here is **resource sharing**, and the goal is to make all programs, equipment, and especially data available to anyone on the network without regard to the physical location of the resource and the user. An obvious and widespread example is having a group of office workers share a common printer. None of the individuals really needs a private printer, and a high-volume networked printer is often cheaper, faster, and easier to maintain than a large collection of individual printers.

However, probably even more important than sharing physical resources such as printers, scanners, and CD burners, is sharing information. Every large and medium-sized company and many small companies are vitally dependent on computerized information. Most companies have customer records, inventories, accounts receivable, financial statements, tax information, and much more online. If all of its computers went down, a bank could not last more than five minutes. A modern manufacturing plant, with a computer-controlled assembly line, would not last even that long. Even a small travel agency or three-person law firm is now highly dependent on computer networks for allowing employees to access relevant information and documents instantly.

For smaller companies, all the computers are likely to be in a single office or perhaps a single building, but for larger ones, the computers and employees may be scattered over dozens of offices and plants in many countries. Nevertheless, a sales person in New York might sometimes need access to a product inventory

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