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SCREENING NOTES

5 Signals That Separate a Linux Admin from a Trading Infrastructure Engineer

What I actually listen for when screening infrastructure candidates for HFT hedge funds.

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01 They narrate the incident, not the theory

Anyone can describe kernel bypass or NUMA-aware pinning in the abstract. The signal is whether they can walk through a real production incident — what they checked first, what the trace actually showed, and what they got wrong before they got it right. Theory-only answers stall after one follow-up question.

02 “It depends” comes with the dependency named

A strong infra engineer answers latency and reliability trade-off questions with the specific constraint that would change their answer — hardware, workload, or market conditions. A weaker candidate either commits to one answer regardless of context, or hedges without ever naming what the trade-off actually hinges on.

03 They know what they didn't own

On a trading infra team, most engineers touch systems they don't fully own. The candidates worth shortlisting are precise about the boundary — what was their build versus what they inherited, supported, or escalated. Vagueness about ownership is usually vagueness about depth.

04 Uptime pressure is described, not just claimed

“24/7 production” appears on most CVs in this space. What differentiates candidates is whether they can describe what actually changes about how they work when the trading day is live versus when it isn't — monitoring, change windows, who they'd wake up and when.

05 They can explain a decision they'd now reverse

Trading infrastructure moves fast enough that yesterday's right call is sometimes today's technical debt. Candidates who can name a hardware, network, or architecture decision they'd make differently today — and why — tend to be the ones who are actually learning from production, not just surviving it.

None of this is a script to prep against — it's the shape of the conversation. The candidates who are worth your interview time hold up under follow-up questions; the ones who've only memorised the vocabulary don't.

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