

BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES MOHR

Don't Click on the Blue e!

I am slowly switching my browsers to Firefox, so I was looking forward to reading the book called *Don't Click on the Blue e!*, but I found the book somewhat of a disappointment. At the low end of the price scale, one does not always expect huge amounts of information, and this book definitely falls into that description. About a quarter of this already thin book covers things like the history of the World Wide Web and web browsers, as well as an overview of other web browsers.

In many places, the book felt like the author was trying to simply add material to an already thin book just to reach some arbitrary page count. I think it would have served the book better to cut both the price and the page count in half and sell it as a "quick reference."

Perhaps the most annoying aspect of *Don't Click on the Blue e!* is the fact that

the book is filled with sections on "Where to Learn More." The reason for getting a book like this in the first place is to "learn more," and it is irritating to be continually told to look somewhere else. I frequently felt like I was running into a brick wall. Just as things started to get interesting, I was told to look elsewhere.

I do not mean to say I didn't find the book useful. Despite the title, the book covers a wide range of topics that are applicable to Firefox on any operating system, including why you shouldn't use MS Internet Explorer (the "Blue e"), the basics of installing and configuring Firefox, and various features and add-ons, as well as a discussion on "advanced configuration." The first chapter, "The Problem with the Blue e," was delightful to read despite its super-



fluous rehash of the history of the web. (Here too, I was annoyed at the instructions to "look elsewhere.")

Overall, I did learn a fair bit about what Firefox can do, and this definitely helps my

transition from other browsers. In the overview of other browsers, you'll find a discussion of what these browsers can do and how they differ from Firefox. If that is something you are interested in, the information in this book would probably be useful to you.

Scott Granneman

267 Pages

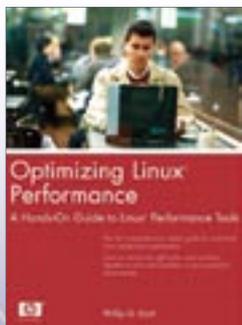
O'Reilly Media, 0-596-00939-9

£ 12.95, US\$ 19.95, EUR 14.95

Optimizing Linux Performance

Despite the fact that *Optimizing Linux Performance* contains a lot of useful information, it was fairly disappointing. One of the first things that hit me was the formatting. I know you shouldn't judge a book by its cover (or formatting), but it seemed to me that the spacing was artificially increased in order to give the impression that there was more material than there really was. With a price at the high end of the scale, this seemed unsettling.

Another thing that bothered me about the book was the title. Although the book does cover a wide range of performance-



related tools, there is very little detail on what to do with the information these tools provide. Granted, this discussion would require an understanding of Linux internals (for example, memory or process management), but this book would definitely have been well served by including an introductory chapter (or two) on how various aspects of the Linux kernel relate to performance.

At a number of points in the book, the level of detail seems almost random. The author goes into details on a very basic issue, while assuming the reader understands more complex topics. For example, he launches into a discussion of what level 1 and level 2 cache are, but at the same time

he assumes you know what the *malloc()* library call does.

For the most part, the book comes across as simply an overview of various performance tools. At many points it seems like the author has just rephrased information from a manpage. One bright spot is the first chapter, "Performance Hunting Tips." This chapter provides useful tips for tracking down performance problems. Although he might have expanded a bit on some of the topics, the chapter could still save you time when you are using the tools discussed in the rest of the book.

Phillip G. Ezolt

353 Pages

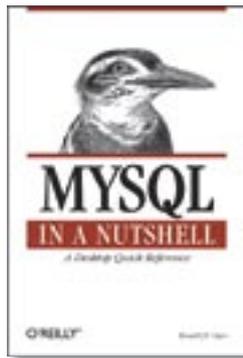
Prentice Hall, 0-13-148682-9

£ 35.99, US\$ 49.99, EUR 46.50

MYSQL in a Nutshell

One important reason why I like nutshell-like books is that you often need to know the question even exists before you can begin looking for an answer. Because of this, I find “quick references” extremely useful. I often flip through the pages exclaiming “Wow! I didn’t know that!” I sometimes discover that my previous attempts to solve a problem have been mired in re-inventing the wheel or implementing an inefficient solution, and the new information helps me find a better option. *MYSQL in a Nutshell* is definitely one of those books.

The first two chapters contain a general overview of MySQL, discussing *very* briefly what MySQL is all about and how to install it on various platforms. I felt that this was far too superficial for a product of this magnitude. I found only a few sentences about non-free licenses, despite the fact that there are a number of different commercial products that require a license.



(such as MyISAM and InnoDB), differences in various MySQL versions, and so forth. There is also very little information in the book on administering a MySQL database, the contents of the *my.cnf* file, and similar topics. A chapter called “Command-Line Utilities” covers a number of administration tools, but I felt here the information was somewhat lacking.

Despite these minor shortcomings, however, I found subsequent sections of the book very useful. The chapter titled simply “Tutorial” covers the basics of

Also missing from these chapters was a discussion of the various free packages, such as what the MaxDB package is all about. The book also skips a discussion of various table types

creating databases and tables, retrieving and updating data from the database, and so forth. This chapter is followed by another good chapter that covers SQL statements in general, as well as available function groups (such as string functions, date/time functions, mathematical functions, flow control functions, and so forth.)

The last part of the book contains chapters on the APIs for Perl, PHP, and C. A brief introduction to each API is followed with a discussion of the functions that are available through the API. Here too, it was nice to be able to scan through the various functions looking for better techniques. Plus, even if you are familiar with a function, the chapter serves as a helpful reference for the specific syntax.

Russell J.T. Dyer

321 Pages

O'Reilly Media, 0-596-00789-2

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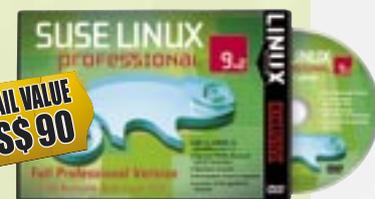
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