# BOOK REVIEWS

BY JAMES PYLES

Ajax on Rails

It seems like everything is on rails these days, but not the kind Union Pacific uses. Rails in this context refers to the MVC web development framework for the Ruby language or Ruby on Rails. Amazon.com offers a diverse herd of Rails books: *Agile Web Development with Rails*, *Rails Cookbook*, *Rails Recipes*, *Ruby on Rails: Up and Running*. What makes Scott Raymond's *Ajax on Rails* so special?

The book's Preface and Introduction suggest that you don't need to be an Ajax or Ruby on Rails (ROR) guru to get something out of this text. The book does assume that readers are conversant in web development with HTML/XHTML, CSS, and at least some JavaScript, in addition to having some server-side programming experience with ASP, Java, or PHP. Also, a little remedial reading on ROR could be in order if Rails is an alien concept.
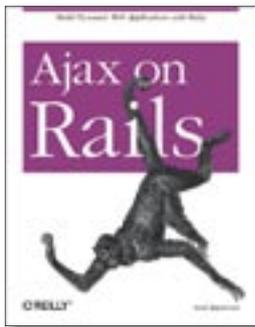
If this is your first experience with Rails, do not buy this book; rather, you should pick up a copy of any number of fine texts on ROR and learn the basics first, then you can come back to this book when you are ready to advance. I guarantee it will make the experience of using Ajax functionality in the Rails framework a lot smoother.

That said, the book is written in an orderly, straightforward manner. Raymond gets the reader up to speed, first defining the basic terms involved in Ajax on Rails, then explaining what you'll need (Ruby tutorials, RubyGems, a database, a text editor) to get started.

In addition to chapters on tools, techniques, usability, testing, and security, the author has included three completely worked-out Ajax on Rails applications so you have examples of the end product to review while you learn. The book doesn't seem to have a related website (besides O'Reilly's book catalog), but the first chapter contains plenty of useful resource links for you to explore.

If you use Ajax for web development and either know something about Rails or want to, Raymond has written the manual for you. Once you understand the basics of Rails, you should get a copy of this invaluable tutorial and reference.

Red Hat Fedora Core 6 Unleashed

This Fedora book is intended for the intermediate to advanced user, but the beginner can learn a lot from this text. Part of the book covers the history of Linux and Fedora, in addition to the basics of installation (the book comes with a Fedora installation DVD), the filesystem, printing, and other activities found in countless other Linux-based books. Also, Fedora Core 6 is not a complete reinvention of Fedora 5, so much of what applies to version 5 can be implemented in version 6.

I was interested in the chapters on multimedia and graphics because both activities have a history of being a bit dodgy in terms of Linux kernel support. In fact, these sections of the book reinforce that this book is not written exclusively for the highly technical person.

Chapters such as Managing Users, Automating Tasks, and System Resources are less home- and small-office oriented and more focused on the activities of a sys admin, so the übergeek as well as the power user can be satisfied. Part 4 in this book launches into a survey of the server roles Fedora can play, with one chapter devoted to the use of MySQL and PostgreSQL with this popular distro. Part 5 provides tutorials on Perl, Python, C/C++, and a few other handy languages, which is just enough to get you started with some basic Linux programming.
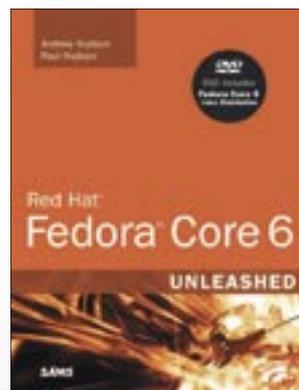
Linux newbies will find this tome intimidating, and experienced users will want a book with a tighter focus. Maybe *Red Hat Fedora Core 6 Unleashed* would be best for someone in-between.

Software Testing Foundations, 2nd edition

Like many other career tracks, the technical industry has a plethora of certification programs, each designed to establish the qualifications of professionals in various areas. A certification program that is lesser known (at least to me) is administered by the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB). This is an international body responsible for establishing the standards for professional software testers. Additionally, on the basis of those standards, ISTQB administers professional testing of candidates for the ISTQB Certified Tester certification. *Software Testing Foundations* was written to specifically map to the official ISTQB content syllabi.

I visited the official ISTQB website (*http://www.istqb.org/*). The ISTQB, having been established in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2002, is currently headquartered in Erlangen, Germany, and can provide certification exams in more than 25 countries. That's pretty impressive.

I downloaded the official syllabi from ISTQB and compared that material with the material in this book. What I found is a very competent, organized instruction text on the basics of software testing.

Software Testing Foundations establishes the official language and terms involved in software testing, as well as methods, principles, tools, and organization of this process. The book presents the material well, despite a small arena of only 288 pages.

The introduction suggests that this text was written for the student with little or no experience in this field who wants to learn software testing as a career and plans to take the ISTQB exam. However, *Software Testing Foundations* feels more like a textbook I'd find on the syllabus of a university computer science course than one mapping to the requirements of a certification exam.

Maybe I'm just too accustomed to the practices of the formal certification machine as fueled by Microsoft, Cisco, CompTIA, and other organizations.

The authors say the book is being adopted by universities, and if I were taking a university course in software design and testing, I'd be delighted to see this book as part of the course materials. *Software Testing Foundations* would work best in a classroom environment in which an instructor and lab setup could help the student step beyond the conceptual to the practical.