

One Last Compile...

I'm a book junkie. I can't help it. I can't go past a bookshop without going into it, and I can't come out of it again until I've bought something. If I was into origami or mediaeval sculpture, this would probably be quite a cheap habit, but as a programmer and all round computer geek, it gets to be damn expensive.

Maybe, I think to myself as I bumble around the basement of Dillons, this is the day that I should start Learning Java in 21 days. A book on Software Engineering is always useful. Ditto Data Structures. And I really should get a copy of the Centenary Edition of Frederick Brook's *The Mythical Man Month*, because everybody says it's a classic and I could use the credibility of having a dog-eared copy on my desk, with lots of exclamation marks and the words "how true" alongside bits of the text.

Delphi, of course, has been one long blissful excuse to buy books at the company's expense. "The documentation's *appalling!*" I wail unhappily at my boss, "Everybody says so!" And so, grumpily, he gives in, and out I trot, armed with the corporate credit card, to spend a happy forty minutes choosing between *Developing with Delphi*, *The Delphi Programming Explorer*, *Borland Delphi How To* and *Delphi Unleashed* and any of the other dozens of tomes on offer.

I've developed a pretty good way of choosing which one to buy, which you might find useful. Forget the breadth of coverage, the free CD or the readability. There are more important things to consider.

Once upon a time, I wanted to be a graphic designer. I even bought a book on Neville Brody to prove it. I've been known to entertain and astound my friends at parties by picking up a book or magazine at random and telling them what fonts are used for the body text, headline, and subheads. Armed with my artistic sensibilities, I tut disapprovingly at Delphi books which use Times, Helvetica or Universe, and move on to the next in the shelf. I smile fondly on those which use my beloved Garamond, even if they're wildly inappropriate for my needs. And I laugh in disbelief at those which have the temerity to use a body type larger than 13 point. Either these people think that I'm going to be impressed by a book which is twice the size it needs to be, or they think I'm so stupid that I Need Extra Big Type In Order For Me To Understand Stuff.

Next, I always choose my authors carefully. I don't want to spend time reading the words of dorks. Technical authors who are dorks give the game away by devoting pages of the introduction to paens of love to their unfortunate spouses, children, parents and pets, all of whom must die of embarrassment every time a new edition comes out (being addressed by your Significant Other as 'Honey Bear' in a book on Delphi programming is surely reasonable grounds for divorce). No, my life is sad enough already without allowing people like these into it. My rule is a paragraph, no more, on dedications to Honey Bear, little Alberta-May, Davy Jr III, and Thumper the Spaniel.

If a book's made it through the tests above, I feel it deserves my cash. If a tie-break is required between two or more competing volumes, I quickly flick through them looking for tips and hints that will make me look good without involving me in any effort. If it can supply those, it definitely deserves to sit impressively on my desk and gather dust. After all, if I'm actually stuck on something, I'll put a question on Cix or CompuServe just like everybody else.

