
Book Review

Ventura Adventure!

PHILIP CROOKES

217 pp., £12.95 ISBN 1-85058-123-1 Sigma Press, Wilmslow, UK, 1989

A glance at the computer section of any bookshop shows that there must be an enormous demand for ‘application software support’ volumes; any of the major PC or MAC applications has its family of ‘Primers’, ‘Advanceds’ and ‘Bibles’. Some of these books perform a vital task, either when the vendor’s manual is inadequate (thus Apple’s Hypertalk language was hardly touched on in the original documentation), or when the product is a tool with a wide variety of uses (such as language compilers). Others, however, do little more than rewrite the official manual, describing the features of a clearly defined package. Their appeal is often to people who have a pirated copy of the software.

This book is unusual in that it is by a British author and publisher (no ‘Bible’ publisher would put out as few as 217 pages); it purports to deal extensively with the UK-specific version (it is not clear where, in fact, it does so), and frequently contrasts the older version 1 with the current version 2, and version 2 with the Professional Extension. It is written in a chatty style (from the subtitle of ‘moving up to version 2’ to ‘the second figure describes what kind of mouse is squeaking’), which can grate on the nerves. Ventura Publisher is a flexible and complicated package, and Crookes deals with seven major themes in successive chapters: basics of Ventura’s mode of operation, preparing text in external files, formatting text with frames and style sheets, introducing graphics (a depressing table lists 54 different graphics file formats), manipulating graphics, generating material (page numbers, cross-references, footnotes etc.) and printing. A final chapter discusses common problems. The author presents a great deal of helpful information about Ventura; most readers will in practice pick up a lot of tips. The problem is that Crookes is too involved in the software, and information is presented in a confused order; Crookes cannot resist telling us about a new exciting feature, or mentioning a bug, at the most inopportune moment. Unfortunately the index does not provide an adequate access to Crookes’s tips scattered all over the book—the omission of ‘table of contents’ from the index is not untypical.

The production of *Ventura Adventure!* is a remarkably faithful demonstration of the good and bad points of DTP. It suffers badly from the lack of a copy editor, with easily found spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, figures badly placed (thus Figure 6.3 appears on a right-hand page, p. 169, but is not referred to until p. 170, where it is called 6.4, since the numbers of 6.3 and 6.4 have been swapped . . .) and time dependencies (‘version 2.0 . . . was announced . . . on September 6th 1988, with the promise that it would be available . . . a month later’). The services of a book designer would not have come amiss—or did someone decide that subsection headings should have more space below them than above? Or that the running head should have about 20 points of leading below it followed by a horizontal rule followed by only 3 points of leading before the text body?

It is not easy to imagine who needs a third-party book about desktop-publishing software like this one. Can you read about the subject, in order to decide what software to

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buy? No, it describes a specific package and assumes hands-on experience. Can you use it instead of the manual to learn the package? Possibly, but the reference material is weak. Can you get new ideas on how to use DTP? Perhaps, but the book does not really give suggestions on design or layout. Will it give a good starting point on how to use the set of desks your friend has copied for you? Yes, but that does make you feel comfortable?

This is an enthusiast's book; it is written for the Ventura user who thinks nothing of typing some assembler into DEBUG to the tune of

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mov ax,0040
mov word ptr[0072], 1234
jmp ffff:0000
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by page 14 of the book, knowing that he or she needs a 'warm reboot' program. Those who thought that desktop-publishing programs were a symptom of software that doesn't require an obsession with PCs may like to read other books.

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