Book Review: JavaScript -The Definitive Guide

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As the owner of over 50 IT related books, I've come to realise that the majority will fit into one of three categories:

1. **Beginners Guides** These are for people new to the specific subject, and are there to get them up to speed quickly. They're usually first spotted by the traditional 'Hello World' example, although some will start off with the very basics and give you a history on computing.

2. **Cook Books** These books are for people with plenty of experience in the subject, but are just too lazy to figure out things from scratch. As such, they are invaluable. They provide solutions to common problems, so the weary programmer doesn't have to re-invent the wheel.

3. **Reference Books** The goal here is too document every single feature of the subject.

It's this last category that *JavaScript — The Definitive Guide* (JSTDG) very definitely comes under.

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The book is now in its 4th edition having been printed in January 2002. With many internet technologies, being over 3 years old would make it obsolete. To my knowledge though, JavaScript hasn't had any significant changes recently, so the book should still prove useful.

Sections 1 and 2 of this book cover the fundamentals of core and client-side JavaScript. To be honest, I'm not sure how useful these sections actually are. They do teach the user how to program in JavaScript, but I'd be hard-pushed to recommend it as a beginner's guide. The language used is very formal and there are no diagrams or exercises to keep the user's attention. With over 400 heavy going pages in sections 1 and 2, it could be a struggle to stay awake. If you're new to JavaScript, there are better books to learn from.

I've been using JavaScript myself for several years now, so I mainly use JSTDG for reference. Sections 3, 4 and 5 of this book are references for Core JavaScript, Client-side JavaScript and the W3C DOM respectively.

As a reference book it can't be faulted. All the classes and functions etc. are fully documented, but most importantly, it also gives you crucial browser compatibility information. Almost every project I undertake has some new JavaScript requirement, and JSTDG helps you solve it. It could be argued that this information can be found on the internet for free, but it can be tricky to find and unreliable. JSTDG is therefore an intelligent investment for the professional web-programmer.

This book isn't for the beginner and it won't provide you with code snippets to drop into projects. You won't read this book from cover to cover, but you will pick it up every other day. You'll pick it up when you can't figure out why something doesn't work. You'll pick it up when you can't remember the properties of certain objects. Finally, you'll use this book when you have to do something exceptional with JavaScript.

Author	David Flanagan
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