XML Bible, Gold Edition (With CD-ROM) by Elliote Rusty Harold

Excellent, Functional Introduction To Xml

The emergence of XML is having an enormous impact on Web development, and scaling the learning curve of this new technology is a priority for many developers. The XML Bible offers a superb introduction to the subject and the groundwork to understand XML's future developments. Author Elliotte Rusty Harold uses a patient, step-by-step discussion that clearly points out the potential of XML without boring his readership with tons of SGML spec-speak. Harold opens quickly with a Hello World example to get the reader coding early, and follows that with a simple but powerful example of XMLs data management benefits--presenting baseball statistics. Once you've coded your first XML documents, you'll be hooked on the technology and motivated to learn about the more sophisticated topics. Style sheet languages are covered comprehensively to illustrate the presentation possibilities and pitfalls. An unusually long list of real-life XML applications also shows how XML is already being used, and there is in-depth coverage of the Resource Description Framework, Channel Definition Format, and Vector Markup Language. The book wraps up with a section that helps you design your own XML application from scratch. Titling a book a bible is a bold move, but this engaging and informative guide is entitled to make this claim. --Stephen W. Plain

Topics covered: XML background, example XML applications, type definitions (DTDs), style languages, Xlinks, Xpointers, Namespaces, application planning, and XML 1.0 specification.

My Personal Review:
This book is terrific, and if you want to learn about using XML in web sites I recommend that you buy it.
XML books are, on the whole, pretty lousy. Everyone keeps talking about how XML will transform the web, but most books are thin on specifics -- exactly how XML will be used, and exactly how to make things happen. I've seen other reviews here from people who feel that this book doesn't do a good enough job of explaining those things. But I think that compared to its competition, it does an excellent job.
XML is new, and its not in widespread use. As I write this, the only popular browser with solid XML support is IE5, and I guess that most people dont want to write sites that only work with one browser. But if you go to the XML site at msdn.microsoft.com and look at the table of contents, youll get an idea of what XML can do, and why youll want to learn it.
The book is well written and its a pleasure to spend time with it. The author knows as much about writing as he does about computers, and he knows a lot about computers. The explanations of XML are clear and conversational in tone. The focus is on using XML in web sites, and the book gives a lot of needed attention to XSL, the style sheet language used to format XML documents for the web. Ive read other XML books, and I bought this one primarily to learn more about XSL.
The title of the book might be somewhat misleading. It is not a comprehensive guide to XML, but rather a best of breed tutorial on a very important chunk of XML stuff youll want to learn. One reviewer pointed out that its a poor reference book, and thats true, in a sense. There is an XML reference in an appendix, but its an ultra-geeky BNF reference that probably wont be very helpful to most readers, especially given the books non-programmer target audience.
A more serious problem is the books neglect of Microsofts XML schema technology, which is far superior, in my view, to DTDs. The word schema doesnt even appear in the index. And finally, this is not the book you want to buy if you want to learn how to program a java XML parsing engine. This is not a book about programming.
So why do I give this book five stars? Its fun to read and its great at explaining XML itself, as well as a number of vital, connected technologies: XSL, DTDs, CSS, CSL, XLinks, and XPointers. I was fuzzy on XSL, XLinks, and XPointers, and this book helped me a lot. Those are exactly the things you need to know to get a XML site up and running on the web. XML is a big, important technology, and I dont think theres a single book that covers everything youll want to know. This book, despite the Bible title, doesnt try to cover everything. But what it does cover, it covers very well.

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