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# How not to get hopelessly lost in cyberspace

James Turner

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO THE INTERNET By Angus J. Kennedy Rough Guides 512 pp., \$8.95

Since so many of the metaphors used to describe the Internet involve geographic terms (cyberspace, the information superhighway), a travel guide to it was inevitable.

It fell to the Rough Guide folks, known for their casual and approachable travel and music tomes, to make the first stab at it.

Unfortunately, the Internet proves to be a uniquely tricky destination to describe. Imagine you were writing a guide to Boston, and you had to write it like this:

"When you get to the ticket counter, you will need to give the ticket seller money to get a ticket. You'll find your money in your wallet, or possibly your purse. If you don't have one, see page 96. You'll need to count out the right amount of money and hand it to the ticket seller, who will give you your ticket and some change, if you gave him/her too much money."

In the same way, before you can learn about the Web, you need to know about the Internet, and before you learn about the Internet, you need to know about getting a connection, and that requires knowing about modems, etc. So, a travel guide to the Internet essentially ends up teaching you how to build your own plane and fly it, just so you can get there.

Because the Rough Guide tries to explain all of this - for both PC and Mac platforms - there's a lot of material to cover. People without a lot of technical experience may feel they're trying to sip water from a fire hose. However, the material is up-to-date and covers the available options and products thoroughly.

Once in cyberspace, the authors offer a brief but complete overview of the customs and inhabitants of this strange land.

The first half of the book covers everything from e-mail to publishing Web pages to real-time chat, paying attention to the required software for each and pitfalls to avoid. The Rough Guide does a nice job of capturing the culture and history of the Internet, and should help readers avoid the worst faux pas.

Once you get to page 237, I'd recommend tearing the remainder of the book off and throwing it away. These lists are out of date the moment the last line is written. The reader is much better served by the listing of search engines earlier in the book. "The Rough Guide to the Internet" does a credible job of capturing the Internet as it exists today and would make a reasonable choice as an introduction to cyberspace.

\*James Turner is the technical administrator of The Christian Science Monitor's Electronic Edition Web site.

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