Preface

This book is about JavaHelp™ from Sun Microsystems. JavaHelp is an online help system developed in the Java™ programming language. It is similar to other help systems, such as WinHelp and HTML Help, in that you use a table of contents (TOC), index, or word-search index to find and display help topics. JavaHelp can be used for many online documentation purposes, but its primary function is to provide an online help system to support Java applications.

Of course, as with any new online help system, people have many questions they need answered and demands they need addressed. This book attempts to address those questions and demands and teaches you how to develop usable online help systems with JavaHelp. To provide a comprehensive look at JavaHelp development, this book covers the main features and options of JavaHelp by presenting the following topics:

- Understanding JavaHelp
- Creating a basic JavaHelp system
- Planning the JavaHelp project
- Preparing help topics
- Creating system and navigation files
- Enhancing the JavaHelp system
- Deploying the JavaHelp system
- Using third-party help-authoring tools

Audience

While it would probably suffice to say that this book is for any person interested in learning JavaHelp and developing usable JavaHelp systems, I can think of two specific groups of people who will likely get the most out of this book: Java developers and technical writers.

Many Java developers don't have technical writers to handle software documentation. If you are one of these developers, you will find this book a great supplement to your other O'Reilly Java books. You might not have the need or desire to read the book cover to cover (although I recommend you do), but you will find that specific sections give you the information you need. You will want to read at least this Preface and Chapter 1, *Understanding JavaHelp*, to learn how to create a basic JavaHelp system. You should also scan the book for tips on making your help system usable.

The book is also designed for technical writers, who are faced with the challenge of learning many types of documentation systems. As more applications are being developed in the Java programming language, you will soon find a strong need for learning the JavaHelp system. This book will help you learn how to develop Java-Help systems quickly and easily. Because of your need to master online help systems, you probably want to read the book cover to cover. However, if you are experienced with online help design and authoring, I have clearly identified sections so that you will know when you can skip over material.

About This Book

This book covers the main features and options of JavaHelp. It presents concepts, chapter by chapter, until you have a complete understanding of how to create usable JavaHelp systems and how to integrate them into applications and Java applets. The key phrase here is *create usable JavaHelp systems.* I emphasize this phrase because this book not only teaches you how to create JavaHelp systems but also provides tips for making those systems usable. If you are an experienced help author, you may not need this extra information. But if you are creating a help system for the first time, you may find that the help-authoring tips are quite helpful. Use them and your application users will be thankful.

Now that you know what this book is about, I should explain what this book is not about. This book is not a manual that focuses on the technical aspects of the Java-Help application programming interface (API). In fact, you won't find a lot of low-level technical information about JavaHelp in this book. I do cover enough technical information to help you understand how JavaHelp works, and I provide code samples to help you understand how to deploy JavaHelp with your applications.

However, the book's focus is primarily on how to work with JavaHelp and how to design and create usable JavaHelp online help systems. If you are interested in learning more about lower-level technical specifications of JavaHelp, you can access technical documents through Sun Microsystems' Java Technology web site at *www.javasoft.com.* One technical document in particular you might want to review is the JavaHelp specification.

Assumptions This Book Makes

As you will learn in this book, you must write JavaHelp topics (the actual help topics that make up the JavaHelp system) in HTML. Since this book is about Java-Help and not HTML, it assumes you have a basic understanding of HTML. I'm not saying you have to be a webmaster or HTML programmer, but you must have a basic understanding of HTML tags and how to use them. I provide ideas on how to format your topics, but I don't stop to explain what the HTML behind them means. If you have no experience with HTML, have no fear. All you will need is a good HTML editor to create your help topics. You may also want to refer to *HTML: The Definitive Guide*, by Chuck Musciano and Bill Kennedy (O'Reilly & Associates), as a HTML reference. I refer to this book many times when creating HTML topic files.

Conventions Used in This Book

The following font conventions are used in this book:

Italic is used for:

- Unix pathnames, filenames, and program names

- Internet addresses, such as domain names and URLs

- New terms where they are defined

Boldface is used for:

- Names of GUI items: window names, buttons, menu choices, etc.

`Constant Width` is used for:

- Command lines and options that should be typed verbatim

- Names and keywords in Java programs, including method names, variable names, and class names

- XML element tags

Comments and Questions

The information in this book has been tested and verified, but you may find that features have changed (or even find mistakes!). You can send any errors you find, as well as suggestions for future editions, to:

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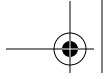
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One of the most important chapters in this book, Chapter 7, *Using the JavaHelp API for Advanced Presentation Options*, would not have been possible without Marc Loy. The chapter is technical and required the touch of a talented Java developer. Marc wrote most of the first draft for me to make sure the chapter included the appropriate level of information for Java developers. As part of his work on the chapter, Marc also developed the small sample application that demonstrates the Java code for implementing JavaHelp. Finally, Marc also put together Appendix C, *The Java-Help API*. Thank you, Marc, for being so generous with your time and Java programming talents. This book would not be complete if it weren't for your help.

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Finally, for all of my friends who had no idea what I've been writing about: read this book, and you'll finally understand what JavaHelp is.