

Bookcase

Bookish

If it takes you more than five minutes to find a specific book, it may be time to start thinking about a literature database. Bookcase manages your library without you needing a separate database server. We take a look to see if it is configurable for all your needs.

BY FRANK WIEDUWILT

No matter whether you need to keep track of the required reading for your university course, or simply want to avoid having to rack your brains to find out which book your best friend “borrowed” on her last visit – if you are losing track of your reading material *Bookcase* may be the answer.

The program keeps track of your personal collection of books by storing records in a human-readable XML format text file. The **DTD** for the database file is available on the program’s homepage [1].

Installation

Bookworms who want to compile the sources will need both KDE 3.x and the *libxml* and *libxslt* libraries; they are



included (and installed for the most part) with the majority of the more recent distribution.

You can extract the source code archive, which is available from [1] or on the subscription CD, as follows:

```
tar -xzf bookcase-0.4.1.tar.gz
```

and then change to the new directory *bookcase-0.4.1*. Type *./configure* to prepare the source code for compilation, then *make* to start compiling. Finally, ensure that you are *root* and type *make install* to install the program. The book collection manager is launched by typing *bookcase &* in a command line window (Figure 1).

Mandrake 9.0 users can save themselves a lot of work by using the **rpm** package, which is also on the subscription CD, by ensuring that they are logged on as *root* and then typing *rpm -i bookcase-0.4.1-1lrs.i586.rpm* to install the package.

Bring on the Books!

The left panel in the Bookcase program window displays a tree view with records; the top right displays a list of books, with

text boxes on the lower right. The lower right panel contains four tabs. The *General* tab provides text boxes for title, subtitle, and author, the binding type, and the price.

Publishing allows you to enter details on when and where the book was published, the edition and the size of the book. This is also where you store the **ISBN** number. The *Classification* and *Personal* tabs allow you to grade your books, and add notes or keywords to describe the contents.

To add a new book, simply click on *New Book* in the editing panel and type the required data. The program conveniently provides history based support for the *Author*, *Publisher*, and *Language* fields, allowing the user to add and



GLOSSARY

DTD: The “Document Type Definition” contains details on what XML tags (formatting instructions) can be used in what context within a specific XML file.

rpm: The “Red Hat Package Manager” is a program for installing and managing software packages that honors package dependencies.

ISBN: Every book is assigned a globally unique identifier, or “International Standard Book Number”, that stores information such as country where the book was published, the publishing company, and the language.

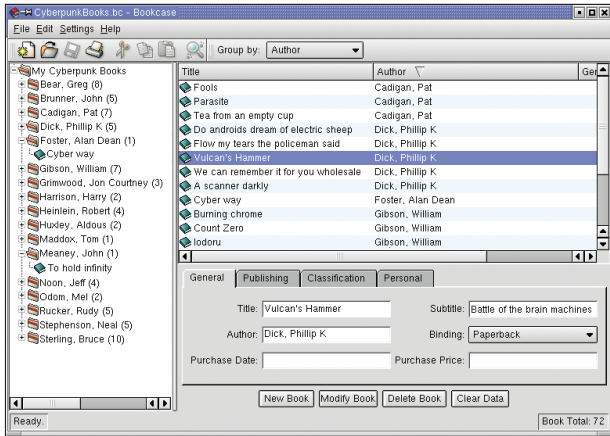


Figure 1: A case full of books

complete entries based on existing database records (Figure 2).

To configure this feature, right click on one of the text boxes and select *Auto Completion* in the drop-down menu. There are four options: *Automatic* and *Short Automatic* autocomplete words typed by the user, just like a word processor. The *Dropdown List* opens a menu with a selection of similar entries (like the URL box in a browser), and *Manual* displays a menu only when the user hits [Ctrl-E] while entering data. Finally, *None* disables entry support.

Clicking on *Add Book* saves the current record and displays it in the tree view and the list. To edit a book record, select the record either in the tree or list view, and modify the entries in the data entry mask. When you are finished, click on *Modify Book* to store the record.

To delete a record, select a target and then click on *Delete Book* or select *Delete* in the drop-down menu for the book list. Doing so reveals one of the program's weaker points: users are expected to use the mouse to switch between tabs, and this impacts data manipulation speeds.

The author's todo list does include keyboard shortcuts for data entry. You can use a typical keyboard shortcut, [Ctrl-S] to save the database, however, a

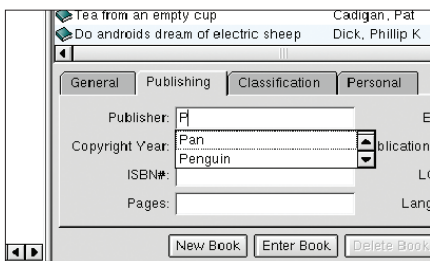


Figure 2: Data entry support

bug might rear its ugly head at this point. The "Save As" dialog continues to appear despite having saved the file, and you have to retype the filename. Another annoying thing is the fact that Bookcase does not keep track of the last directory used, and this forces the user to navigate the directory tree to find the directory containing the file.

Group Dynamics

The program's data management functions are not particularly advanced. You can sort the book list by clicking on the header of the column you want to sort by. Entries can additionally be grouped by various fields, such as *Author* or *Language* (Figure 3).

You can select the required field from a list in the toolbar. Grouping records will not affect the list order. Although there are no functions for filtering and searching the database, the program's author has promised to add them to the next version.

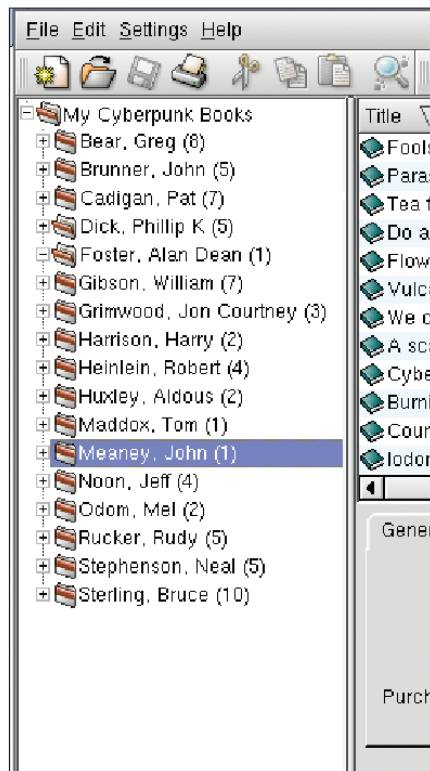


Figure 3: Grouping records

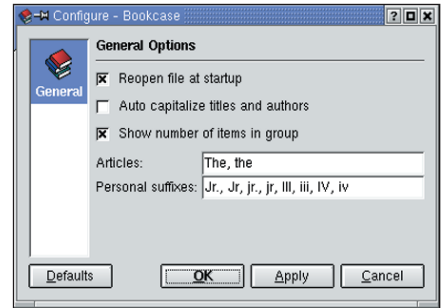


Figure 4: Setting up Bookcase

In addition to the functions already mentioned, the author plans to integrate an image box that will allow users to scan book covers. He is also considering adding additional databases for CDs, for example.

Set me up!

The Bookcase configuration dialog, which is accessed via *Settings / Configure Bookcase*, is well-organized (Figure 4). The *Reopen at Startup* option is particularly useful: enabling this option allows the user to carry on working on the same database as used in the last session.

Selecting *Show number of books in group* will display the number of records for each group in the tree view, providing grouping is enabled (Figure 3).

Despite the low version number, the program is quick, powerful and not prone to crash. The help function should be useful for users new to the program. In the meantime users can look forward to the promised filter and search functions that would help Bookcase earn the title of a "useful little book collection manager".

INFO

[1] Bookcase homepage:
<http://www.periapsis.org/bookcase/>

THE AUTHOR

Frank Wieduwilt originally studied history and has been working for several years as a freelance technical author for several publishing companies in Berlin, Germany, where he writes manuals for database software solutions. Frank is a regular contributor to Linux Magazine specializing in SOHO topics such as office and graphics programs.

