



Basic Black by Arthur Black

Brave new world

One of the great things about being in a book club is being forced to read books you'd normally fling across the room. I finished such a book recently, called *The Diamond Age*, by Neal Stephenson. It's science fiction.

I hate science fiction.

Well, not true - I don't hate science fiction, I hate the technological zeal which infects the genre. I'm not a Machine Guy. And science fiction seems to abound in time machines, particle accelerators and bizarre phenomena with tongue-numbing names like Chrono-Synclastic Infundibula.

The Diamond Age is set in a future in which every household boasts an M.C., right in there between the fridge and the washer-dryer. M.C. stands for 'Matter Compactor'. You need anything? A pair of pants? A new mattress? A pizza all-dressed? Just dial it up on the Matter Compactor and in about as long as it takes a vending machine to spit out a Diet Coke, the object of your desire materializes before your eyes.

When I got to the last page of *The Diamond Age* I thought: "Huh. Imagine hav-

ing the imagination to imagine something as far-out as a 'Matter Compactor'. Then I picked up a copy of *National Geographic* and discovered that Neal Stephenson and I are a little behind the times. Matter Compactors already exist.

The official name is 'digital fabricator' but proponents just call them 'fabbers'. Industrial fabbers are already old hat. Forensic scientists and anthropologists use them to make three-dimensional replicas of human bones from digital models. Car manufacturers in Detroit routinely fire up fabbers to create small car parts from digitally-rendered artists sketches.

According to Neil Gershenfeld, we've only just begun. Gershenfeld is the director of a division called The Center for Bits and Atoms at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He believes personal 'fabbers' are not only possible, they're just around the corner. He foresees the day when you and I will each have an in-home gizmo that can whip up a cell phone, a clock radio - even a computer. "It's like taking the tools of the factory and putting them in your own home".

Gershenfeld compares them to your computer printer. The way it will work, he says, is you'll sit down and design something - a footstool, say -- on your desktop, then just punch the "Print" (or "Fab") button - and presto, out pops a brand new footstool.

How does that happen? Where does my Fabber get the leatherette? The wooden legs? The carpet tacks? Damned if I know. All I do know is that Big Thinkers and Technoboffins already act like this is old news. Indeed, Freeman Dyson, a world-renowned professor of physics at Princeton and one of the world's Biggest Thinkers, foresees the day when we will be using fabbers to create new life-forms, like 30-foot geraniums or weird pets - say, a 200 pound Chihuahua. (Hey, if it ever bit you, you could throw a saddle on it and ride for help.)

Dyson says the possibilities are endless. "You could imagine growing furniture," he says, "if you could persuade a tree to grow in the right shape."

Sounds insane, does it not? But think for a moment. Think of the world as it was not long ago. People got around (if they got around at all) with horses. There was no such thing as an airplane in the sky, a motor boat on the water or a tractor in the field. There was no television. There was no radio. Vast areas of the country didn't have electric light. Things we take for granted - instant replay, shrink-wrap plastic, nylon stockings - would have been as alien as a space ship from Betelgeuse.

When was this - The Dark Ages? Elizabethan times? No, this was less than a century ago - an eyeblink in time. There are people living today who can remember that world. And we needn't go back that far. A mere 20 years ago I would have been pecking out these thoughts on a manual Olivetti typewriter on two-part Canary typing paper. And if someone had interrupted me to chat about The Internet, email, websites, blogging or laptops, I would have assumed I was talking to the chief purser from a space ship just in from Betelgeuse.

So I'm not laughing at the idea of Matter Compactors and 'fabbers'. I'm keeping an open mind so that I can be ready for the Brave New World on our doorstep.

And I'm taking positive, concrete steps to make sure I'm ready.

First thing tomorrow, I figure out how to program the VCR.

Annual Maple Syrup Day at Ganaraska Forest

GANARASKA FOREST - The sugar shack is open once again for the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority's (GRCA) Annual Maple Syrup Program. Mark Saturday, March 27, 2004 on your calendar for a fun Maple Syrup Day at the Ganaraska Forest Centre from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. There are lots of activities planned for the whole family.

Enjoy a guided tour of the Maple Valley sap-collecting route, then listen to tales of traditional maple syrup making around the campfire as the sap boils in the outdoor cauldron. There will be demonstrations of native and pioneer syrup making methods and modern sap collection systems. Visit the sugar shack operation and learn how a sap evaporator works. Children can participate in storytelling and face painting before everyone sits down and enjoys a pancake breakfast complete with sausages, fresh maple syrup, coffee, tea and juice. There is also a free draw for everyone who comes out to Maple Syrup Day.

Admission for the activities and pancake breakfast is \$20 for families, \$8 for adults and \$6 for children, students and seniors. For the tour and activities only, the price is \$10 for families, \$4 for adults and \$2

for children, students and seniors. Members of the Ganaraska Forest receive a discount on admission rates. Pre-registration is not necessary. For more information on the public Maple Syrup Day, please call the Ganaraska Forest Centre at (905) 797-2721 or email gfc@eagle.ca.

From March 29th to April 8th, the GRCA is offering day and residential programs to schools that wish to give their students a hands-on look at the tradition of maple syrup production. Helping to collect sap, experimenting with different syrup production techniques, studying the maple trees and taste-testing the maple syrup are just a few activities that students will delve into during the program.

The Ganaraska Forest Centre is approximately a 20-minute drive from both Port Hope and Orono. If you're traveling from the west, exit Highway 115 and travel east about 10 km on Durham Road 9. Turn left on Cold Springs Camp Road and proceed 4 km to the Forest Centre. From the east, travel west off County Road 28 onto County Road 9 and proceed about 2 km west of Elizabethtown. Turn right at Cold Springs Camp Road and proceed 4 km to the Forest Centre.

Red Cross offers courses in April

DURHAM - The Canadian Red Cross will be hosting a Babysitting Facilitator Course and a First Aid Instructor course during the month of April.

Become a Babysitting Facilitator by attending the April 5 course 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Techniques covered include first aid, CPR, and common problems such as choking, bleeding, burns, poisoning and fire. The cost for this course is \$130 and includes all materials.

Individuals interested in becoming certified first aid

instructors can attend the Red Cross Instructor course April 21, 22, and 23, in which participants learn how to present Red Cross first aid and CPR to the public. Participation during all three dates is expected in order to earn certification. Cost is \$325 and includes all materials.

For further information or to register, contact the Canadian Red Cross, Region of Durham, 905-723-2933. All courses are held at the branch, located at 585 Wentworth St. E., Unit 40 in Oshawa.



*You've got
the last word*

Got a story that needs telling? Then this is your opportunity to put pen-to-paper! You can have the "**Last Word**" simply by emailing your story to: oronotimes@speedline.ca or fax us at 905-983-5301 or drop by the office: 5310 Main Street, Orono between 8 and 5 Monday to Friday.



MORRIS FUNERAL CHAPEL LTD.

SERVING DURHAM REGION SINCE 1841

ALL FUNERAL SERVICES
PREARRANGED AND/OR PREPAID

BURIAL - CREMATION - TRANSFERS

"WHERE PROFESSIONAL
ETIQUETTE IS IMPORTANT"

FUNERAL DIRECTORS

PAUL R. MORRIS
DOUG R. RUTHERFORD

GARY M. CONWAY
DEBRA D. KELLEHER

905-623-5480

4 DIVISION ST., BOWMANVILLE - AT QUEEN ST.

BB's



Brigitte
Brown

Gift

Certificates
Available

ESTHETIC STUDIO

- Pedicures/Manicures
- Waxing
- Nail Extensions
- Air Brushing
- Eyelash Tinting
- Electronic Muscle Stimulate (EMS)
- Paraffin Wax

15% DISCOUNT with coupon

171 Mill Street, Orono, ON L0B 1M0 • 905-983-8169