

Technoverts in Hell

Written by Alex Baer

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So, here, we *technoverts* are gathered, hanging out in Hell's Waiting Room, or some antecedent zone, propped up on a mushy, trashed sofa, pitched down and to the right via a missing caster, accidentally and unintentionally side-saddle surfing against gravity, counterbalancing ourselves and our black coffee the color of burnt brimstone in a gleaming-white styrofoam cup, eyeing the other options in seating: one of the mismatched, armless, straight-backed, metal-legged, vinyl-covered, dinette-set sort of chairs. Or else, it's the lumpy, lumpen utility seat and camouflaged toy chest in the corner, a mute ottoman in this woebegone empire.

There's an ancient, wooly mammoth of a real-wood, entertainment center and console teevee playing, as the rest of it grazes on the piebald, black-and-white carpet, the color scheme mimicking the screen. Across the room, the picture image alternates its view between hissing snow and a slow-roller of a channel, where the image is always scrolling up, in erratic, self-set speeds.

If you want to keep track of the program, in between moments of sizzling electronic snarls and complete whiteouts, you become a slow-head-nodder: You follow the image up to the top of the screen, then, drop your chin to your chest, in order to pick up the image again at the bottom of the screen, as it re-appears, refreshed, and repeat.

There's a lid, and when lifted, it reveals a working phonograph, a record player, along with AM and FM, too. You could fiddle and twirl the hand-sized knobs and dials inside, and maybe get news from the conflict in Korea, stuck in its own very real time, locked and loaded on the dial.

The record albums can be played in 33 and a third, as they should, or can be *chipmunked-up* to 45 revolutions per minute, or really let fly in their wire-wheeled cage, cranked all the way up to 78. There are kids' records -- mid-sized things smaller than LPs -- and even a small collection of 45s: RPMs, not calibers. A sign says the receptionist has adapters for the 45s, if you would care to leave your driver's license ID. The things must be solid gold.

Maybe the operators of this outfit think an environment like this relaxes and desensitizes the technologically nervous or critically-contumacious consumer, helps us old fogies take a load off and chill before class, being around low-tech disasters such as these.

The free class aims to demonstrate to us Luddites the elementary basics of finagling and wangling elements of modern technology. But, we are not Luddites so much as we are regular people not stuck in time, just too broke or too busy in life to advance in every new nuance and bonus round of every techno-whim with any gushing gusto or breathless relish. You miss one or two upgrades, it's easy to tune out the rest.

Some of us remember Radio Shack's Trash-80, and Pong -- the equivalent of having lived with 8-track tapes in the car, having kerosene-fired computers having 50-pound, CRT monitor screens, or having weaned our cassette-tape Walkmans on coal dust and turpentine -- even our having brick-sized, hefty cellular phones more properly at home in World War Two trenches, back where they started, where they were born.

This is the eventual station in which our tardy group's reluctant and late-running train usually, someday, finally arrives: Artemis and Associates, *Introducers of Tech*, "Help for those with some catching-up to do," according to their office-window logo and business cards. It appears no one has yet brought up that Artemis was the Greek goddess of the hunt, among other things, along with the plague -- odd-seeming, as we technoverts tend to not hunt around at all for upgrades, and, in fact, avoid them like, well...
like the plague.

Nothing too stressful is planned for our first meeting today, for our kindergarten-reprise, just an easygoing overview of consumer electronic products for the last 25 or 30 years, along with a brief explanation of purpose, and the most general view of how to make the things work. Then, aloud, or by actual pencil and paper, we can let them know about any of the things we'd like to know more about, so they can set us up with customized, one-on-one instruction: *easy enough.*

We shuffle into the overview room when we are invited, are told somebody-or-other's running late, but that some other person will come in to help start things up while we wait for our own novitiate guide. As we are taking seats in folding metal chairs, in strides the fast-walking replacement, already saying hello while striding, talking about what we'll hear about while we wait.

"It's an amazing time to be alive, as Nokia has shown by filing patents on its haptic, or touch, feedback in its vibrating, magnetic tattoos -- made by spraying or stamping 'ferromagnetic'

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materials on a user's skin, then pairing it up with a mobile device!" There was a slide, suddenly up on a screen, someone's neck, someone else's face, getting machine-stamped with magnetic tattoos.

Most of us in that first class are starting to get up there in age some, so, given a good-enough cause, we had forgotten how fast we could still get out of a room.

Amazing, haptic tech: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-17447086> and, another one here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-17257316>

No word yet about installing 5-pin neck-jacks, nor nasally-accessed ganglial transceivers, nor even about brain-stem basal-antennae -- but, give it time.