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Ereaders Rule!

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GUEST COMMENTARY

Ereaders rule!

by

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There's a curse mis-attributed to Confucius that goes "May you live in interesting times." Those times are now. What make this time so interesting is the proliferation and availability of electronic information. Stories reporting the death of books, libraries, librarians, and publishing-as-we-know-it fill our news media. Their origins center on the ubiquitous technology of ereaders. They are the future. Print media is doomed.

Ereaders made inroads with the general population this year. Reports for ereader sales and digital books interrupted holiday shopping this season and intruded on my relaxation at my local yarn shop where discussion of which ereader to buy cropped up. Knitters my parents' age coached each other in the preferred ereader. "The Kindle is fabulous," one knitter claimed, "especially given its audio feature that reads to you -- hands free for knitting!" And another knitter derided the Nook's colorful display as too busy and making her eyes ache. Both agreed that ereaders were perfect travelling companions. Lugging books onto planes or trains is bad for backs, both young and old.

As a librarian whose booklust plunged her into the profession, buying an ereader is anathema to my soul. Netlibrary is good for searching electronic text, not for reading. Odious experiences with that service predisposed me against electronic text. And a first foray into Kindle for Blackberry was dismal: my small screen prevented any kind of reading pleasure. A Droid X upgrade proved my immunity to the practice of rereading was shot. My first download to Kindle for Droid was *Finding Tamsen Donner* and was recommended by Maureen Corrigan on her list of best books for 2010. The public library didn't own a copy and my need was fueled by a jolt of instant gratification. I had to read it now.

Fortunately it was available as an instant download. I ate it up, even lounged in bed reading the Droid before turning out the light for the night. The ereading experience hinges on touch-screen navigation and immediate download for me. Months ago I borrowed a friend's Kindle and read free samples from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*. The experience underwhelmed me. Scrolling through its pages bored me. What I missed without knowing it, was the touch-screen navigation--and the touch of paper, to an extent. Advancing through each page in the Kindle reminded me of playing with an etch-a-sketch.

The fatalist in me disbelieves the promises that technology seduces us with. Barring natural disaster print goes the distance. Yet, a power outage or an apocalypse renders electronic information irrelevant in an instant. Is information terrorism such a sci-fi construct? Regardless of these ponderings, it seems that

ereaders have insinuated themselves into our lives, and into our libraries.

What kind of future do we imagine for books? How will we relate to them? How do you imagine libraries will look without books? What objects might librarians manage? And finally, how will we identify books? By their format? Content?

Share your thoughts on the future of ereaders and librarians by posting to the thread on the TLA Forum site http://www.tnla.org/forum.cfm