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Against the Grain Classifieds

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I User
from page 32

try **Staples**. Over to the Palm display case. Nyet. Ask the dude. Nada. Question overheard by section manager. A-ha! **Staples** expects shipments of the **Franklin eBook** reader, but release has been delayed. Don't want a Franklin this time, but are so grateful to find someone who knows what an eBook reader is that we buy an entire skid of Post-Its.

11/25/00: Hey, let's try the Web! Go to **RCA** Web site. Honkin' big TVs. Tons of audio equipment. Satellite dishes...hmmm...no, mustn't lose focus. Try Quick search—eBook readers! Well hidden, but eventually we discover a description. Strange buying experience compared to usual e-commerce, but eventually we get the sucker ordered. We think.

12/10/00: **RCA** eBook arrives. **FedEx** box looks like leftover from *Cast Away*, but contents are OK. Content, in fact, is king, but eBook doesn't have any.

12/17/00: Reader is gift for Ruth's parents. More a rechargeable doorstop than a book unless we get some...uh, content! That's it. Let's get some books! Let's set it all up so they can just start reading! I bet they'll look as happy as the people in the groovy photos!

4:00PM Open box. Find Quick Start guide. "Registration and passcode required to protect billing info." "Do not use in bathtub." "Do not use in thunderstorms."

Hmmm, What is the "eBook Librarian" CD for? Plug in phone cord. Start unit. Begin registration. "Registration sets up an online account

and bookshelf." "Please Wait: Dialing 1-800-...-... Please Wait: Searching for local phone number. Please Wait: Dialing 1-800-...-..."

4:21 PM "Please Wait: Downloading latest version of eBook software." (How long? Can't tell file size or modem speed. Isn't this the latest? What did we buy?)

4:28 PM "Please Wait: Installing Software Update."

4:30 PM "eBook software update complete."

4:31 PM "Download eBook Central Catalog." (But I don't want to download it! I just want to browse it. Please?)

4:33 PM Order subject catalogs from Central catalog. (Order catalogs? What? Do I get \$5 back like **JC Penney**? No. Catalogs are free, but they must be ordered.)

4:35 PM Ordered Current Fiction; Magazines; Non-Fiction catalogs. And...what is ordered must be downloaded....)

4:45 PM "Please Wait: Preparing Title for You. Please Wait: Loading Title. Please Wait: Installing Title. Please Wait: Preparing Title for You. Please Wait: Loading Title. Please Wait: Installing Title. Please Wait: Preparing Title for You. Please Wait: Loading Title. Please Wait: Installing Title."

5:07 PM Now the catalogs are on the reader. How much memory do they take? Browse catalogs, look for likely titles. Select two—**Stephen Ambrose's** new one on **WWII** and **Rosamund Pilcher's** *Winter Solstice*.

5:09 PM Purchase Report. \$39.06 charged to credit card. Done or Download? Uhhh, both, we thought. Did we miss something?

5:10 PM Download first book. "Please Wait: Preparing Title for You. Please Wait: Loading Title. Please Wait: Installing Title."

5:15 PM Download second book. "Please Wait: Preparing Title for You. Please Wait: Loading Title. Please Wait: Installing Title."

5:22 PM Flipping through books, trying out eBook features. Make letters big. Make letters small. Highlight bon mots and deep thoughts. Rotate text to right. Rotate text to left. "Hey Moe, I'm reading sideways...Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk..." Dog-ear page electronically with spiffy stylus. Look up "solstice" in context-sensitive dictionary. The longest day?

5:32 PM Present ready, it's pretty cool—now shut it off.

5:35 PM Oh wait, let's look at the display in the dark. Hit power switch. Unit does not respond. Nothing. Maybe it's the battery. Plug it in. Nothing. Look in the manual. "Press switch and release." Really. Rising dismay. Look for numbers to call.

5:45 PM Call tech support. "Thank you for calling eBook tech support...Our hours are Monday-Friday 9-9 Central time." Ruth makes fierce strangling sounds, like when she does Tae Bo. Violence in the air.

5:48 PM Walk away. Step away from the eBook device...slowly. Do it now! Wonder... How do we get credit for eBook bought? Is it on the device or on the online bookshelf? Both? Will we have to repeat all this when the replacement arrives? Christmas is only a week away. Well, we can just give them a picture of it....

5:58 PM Uncork bottle of **Shiraz**. Watch TV. Screen blacks out in the middle of *60 Minutes*. Linger image of the gap in **Morley Safer's** teeth. Return eBook for satellite dish?

12/18/00: Ignore problem. Testy domestic behavior. Ignore harder. Drive to **Borders**. Buy print copy of *Winter Solstice*. Publisher wins.

4:45 PM Call tech support. Not a toll-free call, this better be quick.

4:45 PM "eBook tech support; this is Craig." Answers on first ring. Whoa! No automated switchboard. Describe problem to new friend Craig, maintaining an absolutely civil tone. Always be nice to tech support.

4:46 PM "There's a re-set button under the flap for the Smart Media card. Stick a pin or paper clip in there, then power it up. Lock-ups—they happen sometimes; it's a known problem. (If it's a known problem, Craig, is there a known solution?) Nah, it's a known problem, but the cause is unknown. Always get the firmware updates." Ummm, have you considered mentioning that in the User Guide?

4:47 PM Unbend paper clip. Stick in tiny hole. Flick power switch. Eureka. Now it's as good as a book. The same one we have in print.

Next Issue: "Crisis: Grandma Finishes *Winter Solstice* and Wants Another eBook."

AGAINST THE GRAIN CLASSIFIEDS

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