

Techno-peasants unite

You have nothing to fear from the computer revolution, author explains in new book

SURVIVING THE INFORMATION AGE, by Jim Carroll (Prentice-Hall Canada, 218 pages, \$14.95).

By Mike Strathdee

Jim Carroll has a message for anyone suffering from logizomechanophobia: Just relax and get over it.

Logizomechanophobia, otherwise known as the fear of computers, is so much a part of our society that it has provided Internet guru Carroll with the basis for a book, and likely countless speaking engagements for months and years to come.

Surviving The Information Age is equal parts a sermon on why we should learn to master rather than

fear computers, and a catalogue of the reasons for the antipathy many people over 30 feel toward the machines that are changing our lives.

Carroll's chronicling of the horror stories which have fed the negative attitudes he wants to combat is the book's strongest section.

Overhype and technobabble

He takes the computer industry to task for overhype and underperforming, for manuals written in incomprehensible technobabble, for poorly designed equipment and arrogant salespeople.

"If the automobile industry released cars the way the software industry released programs, we'd be driving buckets and bolts, held together by string

and wax," he writes.

Yet he has little sympathy for people who are unwilling to try to learn new skills and keep an open mind to the changes of the information age.

The book frequently reads like a graduate sociology thesis, with all of the strengths and weaknesses that implies. Well researched and referenced with excerpts from a number of related books and periodicals, it suffers at points from repetition.

Some of Carroll's assertions deserve examination. Consider his praise of Apple Computer as being "undoubtedly the most brilliant computer company that ever existed, because the entire goal of that corporation has been to try to make computing easy."

Much to the chagrin of people who share Carroll's love for the Mac, brilliance and user friendliness hasn't been enough for Apple to prosper, or perhaps even to survive in its current form.

Carroll makes a reasonable case for the possibilities computing presents, and the benefits that will accrue to those who master the new ways. His message is tailored to the semi-converted, however.

Simpler, more reliable tools, not feel-good books, are what will be needed to win over people whose age or lack of education predispose them to view computers with fear and loathing.

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