

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

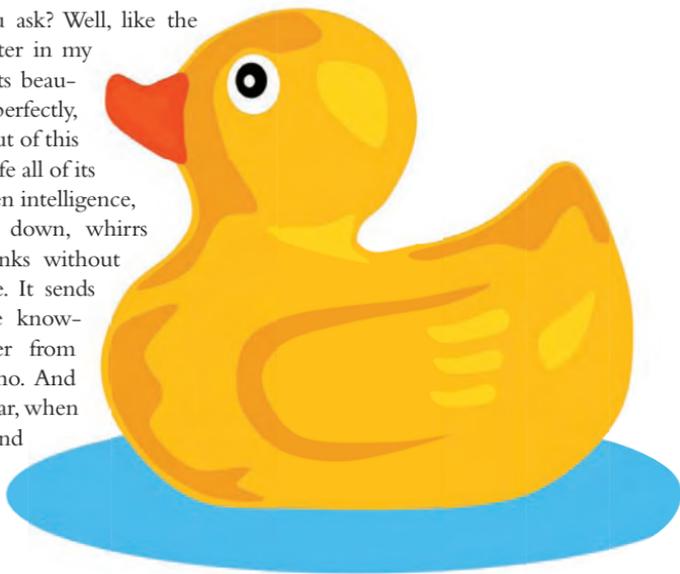
Rubber Ducky

I know this probably sounds paranoid, but I've become seriously scared of technology. My life is being taken over by gadgets, gizmos, wotsits and whizz-bangs that are a whole lot smarter than they need to be. My aging brain is no match for their digital brilliance. And I have ample evidence that they're coming to get me ...

Like what, you ask? Well, like the big new printer in my office. It prints beautifully, and copies perfectly, with colour that's out of this world. But it has a life all of its own! Like some alien intelligence, it starts up, shuts down, whirrs and hums and clunks without any input from me. It sends emails without me knowing, ordering toner from goodness-knows-who. And there are days, I swear, when it watches me – and I feel the need to apologise.

I'm scared of my TV ... have no idea why my video won't work ... can't programme the CD player to save myself ... and get so utterly confused by our accumulated remotes that my wife actually caught me pointing one at our *fireplace* the other day, trying to turn up the heat!

I own a multi-function cellphone that



brings me out in a rash ... a smoke-alarm that screams at me when I try to cook toast ... a car that turns my lights on when it starts to get dark ... and one of those global-positioning navigation-thingsy called Lulu, who speaks to me, growls at me, and tells the CIA where I am.

THERE'S NO PROBLEM THAT A GOOD MIRACLE CAN'T SOLVE.

But what's finally pushed me over the hi-tech edge is a toy. A child's toy. A cheap, battery-powered piece of junk (made in China, for sure) that our grandkids must have left out at the bach.

This bach has been in my family for generations. It's an old bach, a basic bach, a refuge from the complications of life – with very few gadgets, gizmos, wotsits and whizz-bangs. And we go there sometimes, just me and my lady, for a weekend of peace-and-quiet.

Except that, too, is under attack!

The last time we slept at the bach we *didn't* sleep at the bach. We *couldn't* sleep at the bach. Because that toy wouldn't let us. Every half hour, on the dot, we were roused to full alertness by a muffled, high-pitched peeping noise – just loud enough to be heard. First time around, we thought the fridge door was open, and I got up to check – but no. Second time around, we blamed our cellphones, and we both got up to check – but no. Third time around, we realise it was playing a tune, so we turned on all the lights and searched under the beds – but no.

It wasn't until the 15th time, as dawn

was breaking and the birds began to sing, that I realised what the tune was. It was a simple, electronic rendition of 'Rubber Ducky'. I could even recall the words. And, half an hour later, when that muffled, high-pitched peeping started up again, I found myself singing along:

Rubber Ducky, you're the one.

You make bath-time lots of fun

Rubber Ducky, I'm awfully fond of you.

Rubber Ducky, joy of joys

When I squeak you, you make noise

Rubber Ducky, you're my very best friend, it's true!

After breakfast that morning we crawled around on our hands and knees, turned the bach upside down, and finally found the source of that stupid, mental, repetitive Rubber Ducky noise. It was a cute, cuddly, stuffed toy ... tucked away in a dusty nook or cranny.

It wasn't even rubber.

So I did what I had to do.

I killed it.



JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR) HAS RECENTLY BEGUN SEEING A STRESS COUNSELLOR, AND IS FEELING BETTER. WELL, A LITTLE BIT BETTER.

THORT



People think it would be fun to be a bird because you could fly. But they forget the negative side, which is the preening. (Jack Handey)