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ALBERTA'S GUIDE TO THE NEW ECONOMY

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No monkeying around with digi-sound

Swing to MP3s or audio books with shiny new player

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I love gadgets. Glittery, shiny, ooh-and-aah inspiring doodads, whatsits and thingamajigs.

It's a weakness that often afflicts those of us who nurture our inner geek. It also happens to be a weakness of Balinese monkeys, but unless you are planning to travel to the Bali

Sangeh Monkey Forest anytime soon, you need only worry about the former.

(As an aside: If you are planning a trip to Bali and need a trusty guide, please include me in your plans. I don't know the forest at all, but I guarantee I can distract all the monkeys they throw at me.)

I especially love gadgets that are designed to look as cool as they are to operate. When you pull a neatly designed gadget out of your pocket, it makes the spider-sense of every inner-geek within a three-block radius suddenly tingle. One such gadget is the **Duo-64** from [Digisette](#). Get this, it looks like a regular music cassette (except it's metallic and shiny to please the Balinese monkeys), but it's actually a very cool digital audio player.

The Duo-64 comes with 64 MB of onboard memory that is expandable to 128 MB with a removable memory card.

I tested its expandability with a **32 MB MultiMediaCard** from [Lexar Media](#), which



has the added benefit of also being able to slip into a device that requires SD memory. This extra space can hold several full CDs worth of music in MP3 format.

The Duo-64 can play MP3s or act as a digital voice recorder, and for extra coolability it also plays audio books that you download from Audible.com.

It was this last feature that intrigued me the most – especially when I discovered how convenient the Duo-64 makes downloading and listening to audio books. (Plus, Digisette throws in a \$50 coupon for Audible.com to get you rolling.)

To start listening to Robert B. Parker's latest Spenser mystery, *Widow's Walk*, I simply installed the software off the included CD, launched Audible Manager and started shopping. The book cost \$15.95 US (leaving me with a \$34 credit) and is available in several formats depending on quality. The better the quality, the larger the file. With 64 MBs of space available, I chose high quality and downloaded. The transfer to my USB-connected Duo-64 was painless, and within minutes I went outside for a long walk with Spenser as my companion.

As audio books run for hours, the Duo-64 automatically remembers where you left off, so it's easy to get back into the story next time you slip on the headphones. But, the other amazing thing the Duo-64 can do is slide directly into your car's cassette deck. The player will then broadcast using your car stereo. When you leave the car, you just slip the Duo-64 in a pocket and plug your headphones back in.

I found this versatility to be fantastic. For the joggers out there, you'll be pleased to know that unlike a portable CD player, the Duo-64 can't skip since it is completely digital.

The Duo-64 comes with software, earphones, two rechargeable batteries, a wall charger and a car charger, carrying case and USB cable for a retail price of around \$230 US.

Another gadget that will make the Balinese monkeys go wild (not that they were ever the best mannered, mind you) is the **PowerMate** from Griffin Technology.

At first glance, the PowerMate looks like a large, shiny aluminum knob (which happens to match my new Lian-Li PC case to a tee). Once it's plugged in, it looks even cooler as the base appears to float above an electric blue light.

Quite frankly, this is enough to recommend it. It doesn't really matter if it can do anything, because everyone who sees it will soon be oohing and aahing over its looks. But the really amazing thing is that it is also very useful.

The PowerMate can be programmed to do virtually anything that has keyboard equivalents.

When you're playing audio, the PowerMate dial can be used as a volume knob, or a simple tap when the phone rings can mute your speakers. It can also be used as a media controller for iMovie, Final Cut Pro, Premiere and After Effects. In Internet Explorer, it works great for scrolling, with a simple tap activating the back button. I even used it as a game controller.

With its uses limited only by your imagination, the PowerMate is compatible with Mac OS 9/X and Windows 2000/XP. It requires a USB port and retails for \$45 US.

As this long winter crawls to an end, just remember that armed with my latest shiny gadgets I am still your best chance for surviving the cruel taunts of Bali's forest monkeys.

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