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### *The Other Side of the Future!*

#### **Future Lite**

by Lindan Lee Johnson  
[lindanlee@hotmail.com](mailto:lindanlee@hotmail.com)



*Welcome to Future Lite! No topic is too small, no trivia too trivial, and no fact too unfounded if it can possibly provide entertainment or enlightenment for our readers.*

#### **Domestic Engineering**

We live in a world of complex adaptive systems, where interactive networks of checks and balances seamlessly weave together to embrace paradoxes like how one person will be charged a very large fee if she even *thinks* about overdrawing her personal account by one copper penny but her government can keep writing checks and be **TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS** in debt and it doesn't even get a stern form letter from the bank.

So I ask you, considering these factors, do we really want to bring appliances that are smarter than we are into our homes?

For the record, I'm quite fond of technology and a card-carrying early adapter. I was the first person on my *cul de sac* to pay the gross national product of Luxembourg for a front-loading washer and dryer and it was darn well worth it.

My washer has cycles to clean dirt that hasn't even been invented yet. It has a security clearance far higher than anything known to the Homeland Defense Agency that allows it to negotiate with the dryer so that it only takes 8 hours of energy-saving heat to dry my four bath towels properly. Did I mention that these two machines sit up on pedestals and have shiny stainless steel drums, the Midnight Black enamel finish and the gleaming chrome accents that transform my laundry room into a veritable gallery of modern art?

This set came with a thousand-page manual written in Esperanto, accompanied with graphic images in Babylonian hieroglyphics. After I struggled through guessing what the first couple of hundred pages might mean and then tossed it and figured out where the "on/off" switches were and how to add the **High Efficiency Detergent** (*translation: Really Really Expensive Soap*), I stopped worrying.

I'm not an alarmist or a conspiracy theorist... well; I do have my suspicions about the likelihood of my washer, dryer, toaster, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner and scale all needing to be replaced within a 30-day time frame. This alerted me to some alarming trends- mostly occurring in my main living areas- that I feel are evidence-based enough research to bring to your attention.

Last week, after the laundry was done, I saw my two cats sitting patiently in the stainless steel drum of the washing machine. They meowed twice and were gone – DISAPPEARED! Several hours later, I heard a noise in the laundry room and raced back to find them sitting in the dryer safe and sound. So I grabbed the manual and sure enough, on page 997 in a footnote it said:

*May also be used as a domestic teleportation device for cats. Not approved for interplanetary travel.*

So three days ago I was at Sears looking at their high-power vacuum cleaners that now come with actual motors in them instead of the self-propelled hamster wheel that my old cleaner had, and the machines now come in jazzy bright colors. I picked out the best model (*I'm now also the first person on the cul de sac to own a teal blue vacuum cleaner with more power than all the leaf blowers on the block combined*) and asked the Way Too Young Guy to Have Ever Vacuumed A Rug In His Life (W.T.Y.G.) what the difference was between this model and the next model up that cost a couple of mortgage payments more.

ME: Why is this model more expensive?

WTYG: Oh right, ah, it's because it has a **State-of-the-Art Dirt Sensor**.

ME: I don't see anything there.

WTYG: Oh, no man – you can't "see" it but you can watch this **Dirt Sensor Indicator** light right here and it will sense if there's dirt in the carpet.

ME: And then what will it do?

WTYG: Well, like, it sucks it all up.

ME: Like a vacuum cleaner?

WTYG: Exactly!

ME: Does it bag the specimens and send them off to The Sears Sanitation Lab, send me a report on the State of Microorganisms, and make arrests of the identified carpet-trackers as appropriate?

WTYG: Whoa – great idea for a TV show, lady!

Sadly, I did not make this conversation up. Really.

So this morning, I go into the kitchen, step on the new scale that tells not only my weight, my fat content, astrological forecast, but also the stock market and weather reports. **The red digital message area flashed "OVER GOVERNMENT STANDARDS"**. I'm used to rejection, went to the new toaster and popped in an English muffin and the lever refused to go down. **The red digital message area flashed "CARB LOCK ENFORCED"**. I immediately turned to the brand new refrigerator and was

*thinking* about the fresh fruit torte that was leftover from last night's dinner party. Immediately I heard the sound of the refrigerator hermetically sealing itself and as hard as I pulled on the handle it would not open. **The red digital message area flashed "DRINK 8 GLASSES OF WATER AND HAVE A GOOD DAY."**

I am now holding every manual for every new appliance that I have purchased. I intend to climb inside the washing machine, next to the cats, and I'm going to find myself a nice quiet planet where I can have lunch and read every inch of fine print about the physical and psychological assembly and special feature deactivation clauses of my new appliances.

I'm also in the market for a domestic engineer.

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*Note: Please feel free to send in your favorite quotes, predictions, anecdotes, topic du jour, scandals, pet peeves, gossip and rumors and you may find yourself captured in Future-Lite! [lindanlee@hotmail.com](mailto:lindanlee@hotmail.com)*