

A sci-fi dream come true for bibliophiles

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New machine can
make a book for
you in 10 minutes

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SANTA CRUZ — You can imagine it in an episode of "The Jetsons," as one of that show's famous sight gags, or as the main prop if someone were to make a Willy Wonka movie for bookworms. Or maybe you can picture Jules Verne or H.G. Wells a century ago enthralled some Victorian-era audience of amateur futurists speculating on its arrival sometime in the distant 21st century.

Any way you look at it, the Espresso Book Machine invites a sense of marvel. After all, how do you get your head around exactly what this thing can do?

The bizarre reality is you can now walk into Bookshop Santa Cruz, think of some hard-to-find book you'd like to own, or a book that in fact doesn't even exist, and in less than 10 minutes have that book in your hands, still warm from its printing.

On Wednesday, Bookshop Santa Cruz will welcome the future of book-selling when it officially unveils its new Espresso Book Machine, manufactured by the New York company On Demand Books.

The machine is designed to print a book — largely indistinguishable from any book you'd find on a shelf — from any of 8 million titles it has in its database. And yes, amateur writers, it can also create a genuine book from that novel or memoir you've been sitting on for years.

"If you walk in and want a book," said store owner Casey Coonerty Protti, "and if we don't have it on the shelf, we'll print it out right there."

Simple as that.

Bookshop's machine is only the third made available to the public in California. There is one in a bookstore in Southern California, another at Sacramento's public library.

On Wednesday, Bookshop will show off the capabilities of the machine by printing out specially designed copies of "Leaves of Grass," the famous American poetry collection, by Walt Whitman, who has long been Bookshop's literary mascot. It will also announce the winning entry of its name-the-machine contest. You have to think "Walt" is a front-runner.

The event will also feature a panel discussion with



JAMES TENSUAN/SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL PHOTOS

Elizabeth and Joey Goldfield of Santa Cruz gaze into Bookshop Santa Cruz's new book publishing machine.



Bookshop owner Casey Coonerty Protti watches a book being made with Joey and Elizabeth Goldfield.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Espresso Book Machine launch party

WHEN: 7 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Bookshop Santa Cruz, 1520 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz

DETAILS: www.bookshopsantacruz.com

Santa Cruz Sentinel writer Christa Martin and Bookshop's Nici McCown on opportunities for self-publishing. It should be noted that Whitman's "Grass" was self-published.

Protti said the machine has three primary uses. First, it can print books unavailable otherwise. There are limits, however, to what it can create. Titles under copyright may or may not be available, depending on the publisher, so you'll still have to get "The Hunger Games" the old-fashioned way. But just about anything in the public domain is available.

Also, those interested in self-publishing can use the machine to create one copy of their magnum opus, or 100 copies. You can come in armed with a fully de-

signed book on a PDF on a thumb drive, or Bookshop will offer a number of services to help you design the book. A third use is for those who want to create special editions for limited audiences, such as a family history to give for the holidays, or a collection of essays for a teacher in the classroom.

Protti said the cost of a machine-printed book — full color cover but only black and white on the inside pages, in many different sizes and formats — is comparable to a new trade paperback, depending on the number of pages. There is a \$5 base price, plus 4.5 cents per page, with volume discounts.

She declined to reveal the cost of the machine, but press reports put the price tag between \$125,000



A page whizzes through the Espresso Book Machine manufactured by New York's On Demand Books.

and \$150,000. She did say, however, that instead of purchasing the machine outright, Bookshop has instead entered into a partnership to share costs with On Demand Books.

"The industry is changing rapidly and bookstores need to find ways to stay relevant," said Protti, the daughter of Bookshop's founder, Neal Coonerty, now a Santa Cruz County supervisor. "This allows us to go into services. The problem with the book business is that we sell objects where the price is printed right there on the cover. We have a finite margin. So we have to ask ourselves: Are there services we can provide that add real value to people's lives and allow us to have a different revenue stream?"

If publishers were to allow more copyrighted titles to become available,

the machine could represent the future of the book-selling business, as an alternative to Amazon and the other online retailers that pose an existential threat to traditional bookstores. The machine could make inventory, what used to be a big retail advantage — think of Portland, Ore.'s behemoth Powell's Books — into a disadvantage. It's also the industry's answer to the growing popularity of e-books.

"Every conversation around the machine takes about an hour," Protti said. "People are fascinated and want to know how it works. And when you watch someone watching a book being made and it comes out, warm to the touch — it just shows you that the book is not dead. The idea that people don't want physical books anymore is just ridiculous."

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