

COMPUTER SHOPPER

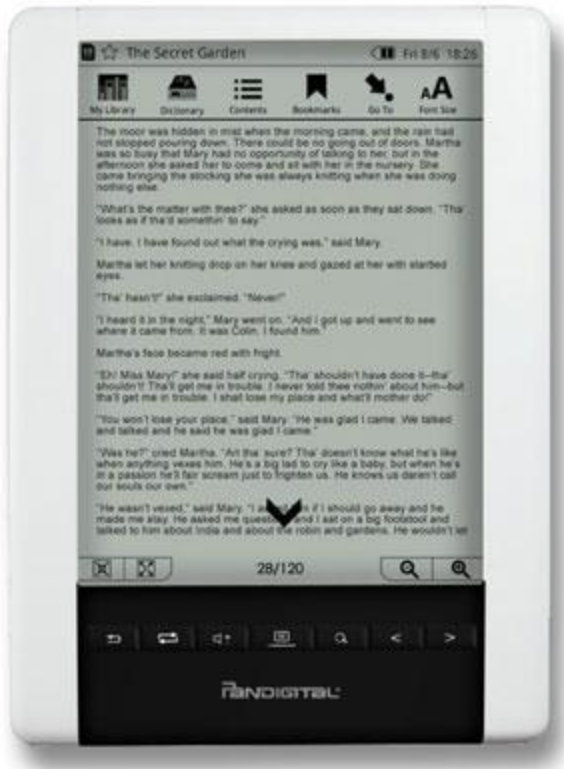
Notes From the Technoground: A Peek at the Pandigital Novel Personal eReader



If all I want to do is read an e-book, do I really need the scads of features the Pandigital Novel comes with?

There have been times in my life when I was a voracious reader. Recent months, however, do not qualify. Between the book I've been writing over the course of the last six months, moving from an apartment in North Jersey to a house in South Jersey (plus all the *fun* things home living brings—who knew trees shed so many leaves?), and being a dad to a very active almost-three-year-old girl, reading has been far down on my leisure list. It's been some years since I took a real vacation, but I remember that when I did, I read something like a book a day—perhaps making up for lost time.

Well, the folks over at Pandigital recently sent me their Pandigital Novel 6" Personal eReader device, and I figured that now might not be a bad time to try becoming a bibliophile again. The writing of the book is mostly done, I've at least unpacked the essentials, and the leaves are all raked up and carted away. There are still plenty of boxes to unpack, and house and dad stuff to do, but my routine is starting to return to normalcy.



The Pandigital Novel 6" Personal eReader

The Pandigital Novel 6" Personal eReader is a monochrome e-book reader (600x800-resolution, with 16 levels of gray-scale) that allows access to the Barnes & Noble e-book bookstore. It can also read ePub and PDF files. It's a little smaller than both the [Amazon Kindle](#) and the [Barnes & Noble Nook](#), although its 9.1-ounce weight falls between these two competitors. The Pandigital Novel comes with 2GB of built-in memory and has a MicroSD card slot that can accommodate cards up to 32GB. The device also has built-in 802.11b/g Wi-Fi. The integrated, rechargeable battery is rated to last up to 6,000 page turns on a full charge. (It recharges via its micro-USB connection, when plugged into a computer or using the included AC adapter.) It also has a built-in speaker and a headphone jack.

The Pandigital Novel's standout feature, though, is that its screen is a full touch-screen-capable display. This is something that neither the monochrome version of the Kindle or Nook can claim (although the Nook does have a small color touch window below the main monochrome screen). The touch display makes it very easy to navigate the various features and menus, but I find it adds little when it comes to actually reading an e-book. When reading, the touch screen's features let me move forward and back a page at a time, enlarge or shrink the book's font, or turn on full-screen mode.



The Amazon Kindle

The Pandigital Novel also comes with a bevy of extra features, such as a music player (it plays MP3 files), a photo viewer (supporting JPEG, PNG, and BMP files), a calendar, a Web browser, an e-mail app, a contacts app, a Sudoku game, a dictionary, an alarm, and a file manager. Certainly, with all these bells and whistles, the touch screen makes using all these extra doodads much easier. Although, I have to ask, do I really need all these extras in a monochrome e-reader? If I wanted this level of functionality, wouldn't I be better off with a color tablet, like [the CherryPad Android tablet I looked at last month](#), or the [Samsung Galaxy Tab](#) that [Sarah Anderson](#) looked at recently?

At this time in the history of consumer-tech development, I think we've reached the point where too many devices are trying to do too many things. Don't get me wrong...I think convergence is a good thing, but only when the converged functions actually make sense. To wit: Do I really want to look at grainy gray-scale photos, manage my schedule, and surf the Web on my e-reader?

As an e-reader, the Pandigital Novel does exactly what it is supposed to do. It admirably displays the e-pages of e-books, e-magazines, and other e-periodicals. It's pretty quick moving from one page to the next, and it has useful navigation features such as TOC and Go To (page or word) options. You can also add bookmarks, notes, and highlights. The Pandigital Novel even includes an iPad-style orientation sensor that automatically switches the display to landscape mode when you flip the unit on its side. (You can disable this feature or lock the orientation, if you want.)

While the pages are legible, I couldn't help noticing that they appeared somewhat faded—a least when compared to the crisper displays of the Kindle or Nook. It turns out that the Pandigital Novel uses an electronic paper technology from a company called Sipix Microcup, while both the Kindle and Nook use electronic paper technology from E Ink Corp. From a pure display-quality perspective, I prefer the way e-book pages look on the screens of the Kindle and Nook devices over the Pandigital Novel—although the difference is subtle.



The Barnes & Noble Nook

Speaking of these other e-readers, all three devices are around the same price point (by about \$10 or so). The Kindle costs \$139, and the Nook sells for \$149. The only place in the United States I could find that was currently selling the Pandigital Novel, Sears, had it for \$139.99. Making matters even murkier, Pandigital's *color* e-reader, the Pandigital Novel 7" Color Multimedia eReader, can be found for as little as \$149.99—a mere \$10 more than the monochrome version.

I've had a chance to play around with the monochrome and color versions of the Nook, and I have to say that the [NOOKcolor](#) is much more responsive and easier to use. Of course, the monochrome units have certain advantages over color units in that they're cheaper, lighter, have longer battery life, and can be viewed in direct sunlight.

I've just started reading James Patterson's *Cross Fire* on the Pandigital Novel, and I'm finding it an enjoyable experience. That said, this experience would probably be nearly identical if I was reading it using a Kindle or a Nook. I suppose when I finally manage to schedule another vacation, I'll cram the device full of e-books and try to read as many of them as possible in the short window of time that I've got. And maybe I'll even try one or two of the Novel's extra functions!

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