

THE GIFT THAT TALKS BACK

How could a Frenchman weaving flowered silk in 1804 have known his punched cards would one day become software? How could two engineers, wanting only to make video-game explosions look wetter and shinier, have known they were building the hardware on which humanity would teach sand to talk?

Nobody planned the talking machine. Nobody ever plans anything — that is the whole story of technology, and nobody told it better than James Burke. A million years ago somebody handed us the first axe, and the deal has never changed: powers beyond your dreams, price beyond your knowing, no returns. This time the tool was woven from everything we ever wrote down — and now it's weaving us back.

From silk looms and frog's legs to the Rosetta Stone, a chess-playing hoax, Betty Shannon's parlour game and the end of scarcity itself: a detective story about how we got here, and the first honest look at what we do now that everybody gets the axe.

A speculative work: this book imagines what James Burke — historian of science, creator of *Connections* — would write about artificial intelligence today. It was written, typeset and fact-checked by a machine of the very kind it describes. Mr. Burke had no part in its making, which is precisely the point of Chapter Ten.

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FROM THE CREATOR OF CONNECTIONS

The Knowledge Loom

*How We Wove a Mind from
Everything We Ever Said*

THE KNOWLEDGE LOOM



JAMES BURKE

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THE DAY THE UNIVERSE CHANGED · THE AXEMAKER'S GIFT