It is a reality of relationships today that what used to be face-to-face connections have been replaced by “electronic, digital, wired, virtual, web, Internet, Net, online” links. Worse, “social media” hides an actual person.

Four construction workers from China, setting up electrical and water systems, and finessing doors, windows, and floors, wanted to speak English. They came to my house to learn to speak, equipped with the ubiquitous smartphone that they continually referred into before uttering a word. They did not seem to live their lives and practice their profession without a moment-by-moment use of the gizmo.

Welcome to Cyber Monday, a day when we recognize this new development in our lives as the smartphone—so recent, introduced by Japan to its market in 1999—blanks the planet of walking fingers, or a set of good thumbs, to navigate the combination of a cellphone, camera, data base and tons of applications in one to blow up your mind.

There’s exploding Samsung’s Galaxy 7 Notes. (Conspiracy theorists suggest someone is sabotaging the production line though we think the conspiracy derives from volatile earth elements used in the manufacture of the units.)

It is the Monday after Thanksgiving, the day Chamber of Commerce merchants have designated as the shopping season that drags on until the Three Kings in Christian-influenced nations. Leave it to market forces to get the last penny off our credit cards.

Black Friday is technology-focus for the serious shopper, and online shopping for leftovers started on a Monday in 2005. Those who would rather baste their turkeys on Thursday, and expect the new items unsold on Thanksgiving Thursday and Black Friday to get a considerable discount on Monday, are fodders to merchants who saw a dime coming and prepared their inventories to accommodate the demand on Monday. Cyber Monday is now globally observed and the credit card industry is happy!

Japan and its investments in Korea and China, and manufacturing outlets in Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, will miniaturize anything that hits the market. The remetao (navigators) of the Carolines now sail with GPS rather than figure out positions from the location of stars and the shape of the wave’s crest. Obviously, the GPS has improved sailing and set survival records even in storms and typhoons.

Online spending has become the mode of our consumption as the post office and the private express services drum business with their deliveries. Who said the PO was dead? Gauging by
the long lines at the Saipan Chalan Kanoa main station, it does not look like they are going to close doors anytime soon. They even have to install new PO boxes now to accommodate a rapidly growing clientele as the island is still unfamiliar with street names, has no numbers on buildings, and mail delivery only at the post office.

The happy option of online shopping is the ability to return merchandize. OK, it is a hassle and it costs _mucho dinero_ for the return postage, but one gets the pleasure of looking at an item and deciding to live without it. It also ensures employment of delivery truck drivers and office workers who sort out packages, albeit helplessly stuck on minimum wage and makeshift working space.

What Cyber Monday has done is to divert our attention from the physical need of paper currency to an imagined digital world objectively held accountable by bank deposits, and the credit cards issued that keep us on the borderline of being broke.

The close to zero in our balances does not hurt as much as the reality of an empty wallet. I have forsaken the functionality of a wallet, save as a fashion statement where I am still attached to the big letter on the leather (plastic inside if cheap) to flash around or lay on a counter so others can see the wallet itself, an item of the past.

But this is our age, the one we created, or helped create, as inescapable as a private vehicle is to get around Saipan, so smile, you are on candid smartphone!

I got passport photos taken (USCIS now requires anyone filling up an application to have a picture taken within 30 days) and I went to my neighborhood photo shop to check if the photo I had on file was still valid. I was hoping that it would be though I suspected it might have been taken more than 30 days before. The counter girl did not bat an eye. “Nope, that was taken 60 days ago,” she said. How she knew I could not tell, nor could I locate a date. The digitized world baffles and causes wonder.

National Geographic had a poster of the 7th billion human on the planet, which would have been a while back since we now number some 7.5 by the population clock, but what was impressive about the poster was that when each of the dots were blown up, it was the full image of a real person. That is what the digital world can do—a universe only about fifteen years old, which renders me a dinosaur on that field.

Cyber Monday squishes data down to a bewildering new world which is here to roost.