

science

The new electronic community

by Garth Sweet

Do you own a computer? If yes, then how about a modem? Modems are one of those things that first-time computer-buyers either buy and never use or never even purchase. If you're not using your modem you may well be missing out on one of the funniest and most productive computer experiences ever.

What experience is this you ask? It's not the internet (see our October 21 issue) — that's interesting but also a little too complex to be instant fun. No what I'm talking about is BBSs.

A BBS is an electronic bulletin board system (hence the acronym).

That still sounds a little vague, but in practice a BBS is an electronic forum where you can talk to other people, get useful programs and help from other users about your computer.

One of the best features of a BBS is that it is menu-driven, easy to use and the people you meet there are people from your community. When it comes to getting help with a computer problem I can think of no better place than a BBS. If you ask a computer salesperson a technical question, the answer you get will probably be vague at best or jaded by their desire to sell you something. A technical support company may be good, but they are usually aimed at business hence the cost is prohibitive and help for a beginner isn't offered. A BBS has none of these disadvantages, plus it has a number of advantages.

First off, BBSs are usually free, the people who run them do so as a hobby, and hence charge nothing for the use

of them. Secondly, all levels of users are there, beginners, intermediate and advanced, so you can get help at a level you can understand. The other service most BBSs offer is file transfers. Most systems keep from 20 to thousands of megabytes of software on-line (that's about 200,000 typed pages). You can get new programs, utilities, pictures and information. All free for the getting.

The metro area is lucky to host over 100 of these BBSs. Most are free, offer a tremendous range of services and support either IBM or Macintosh. People with older or more exotic computers like an Atari or Amiga needn't

worry — there are even BBSs for you too.

To connect up to a BBS, you'll need a modem of course. Modems range in price from \$50.00 up to several thousand dollars, and used ones

can be had for as low as \$10.00 if you're lucky. Until you decide if you like the BBS community I wouldn't recommend getting any better modem than the cheapest one you can. If you come to enjoy BBSs (and I suspect most will), you may want to upgrade to a better one (better means faster retrieval of information).

Once you have a modem and have it connected, you will need a piece of software to run it. If yours didn't come with some (most new modems do), you can go to the help desk in the basement of the Killam Library. They have copies of a free piece of software called Kermit that will do the job. When the modem and the software are installed you will then need a phone line to use (a modem sends and receives its infor-

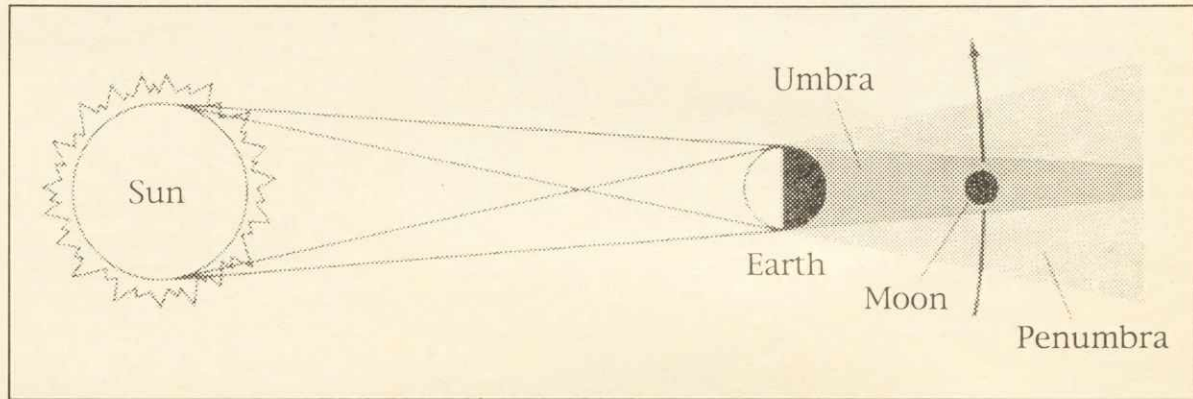
mation over phone lines) — your regular phone line should do nicely.

After all the setting up is done, the only thing left for you to do is call a BBS. To do so you will need to tell the software package a couple of things. One of the things is the phone number

and certain settings the BBS uses. These settings are pretty cryptic, so unless you have an interest in the mundane I suggest you simply enter the settings in and forget trying to understand them (I do). So here's the numbers and settings for a couple of the bigger local BBSs.

Good luck!

Name	Number	Settings
ATAB	435-0751	8 bits, No parity, 1 stop bit
ADSUM	434-3121	8 bits, No parity, 1 stop bit



Lunar show to air Sunday

by F Bhatena

This Sunday, Nova Scotians will have the opportunity to view their first lunar eclipse of 1993. Beginning at 11:27 pm the entire display will last for close to 6 hours, ending at 5:25 am, November 29.

A lunar eclipse occurs when the Earth is between the sun and the moon and its long conical shadow is cast on to the moon. The shadow is composed of two parts, the umbra and the penumbra. The umbra is the shadow that extends from the Earth into space. Surrounding the umbra is the penumbra that is the partially lit area around the umbra. The approximate length of the umbra is 1.3 million kilometres. Since the moon is only 9,200 kilometres in diameter, it can be shadowed in the umbra for up to 2 hours.

Lunar eclipses, unlike solar eclipses, are visible from the entire side of the earth that is facing the moon. On November 28, the moon will rise at 4:18 pm and will enter the penumbra at about 11:27 pm. The total eclipse will happen at 2:02 am on the morning of November 29.

What should one expect to see? High in the night sky on the 29th, assuming it is not overcast, the surface of the moon will become visibly darker. As the moon enters the umbra it will progressively illuminate a reddish hue. The redness is caused by the refraction of light as it passes through the atmosphere. This is similar to the effect that causes sunsets to glow red in colour because the atmosphere filters out lower wavelengths of light.

If the Earth is covered with a heavy layer of clouds, refraction will not occur

as it causes the moon to be invisible during totality. The moon during totality will lie in the centre of the umbra, at about 2:02 am.

So if you happen to be up after midnight on Sunday, glance up and view a natural astronomical phenomenon. Historically, the circular shadow that slowly advanced across the lunar landscape justified the shape of the Earth. For a good viewing location, head out to an area of relatively total darkness, preferably somewhere outside the city. If you miss this eclipse you will have to wait until April 3-4, 1996 before you can view another total lunar eclipse. There are two more eclipses next year: a partial, where only part of the moon passes through the umbra, on May 24-25, and a penumbral on November 17-18, where the moon only passes through the penumbra.



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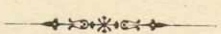


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