Not Sand, Not Sound

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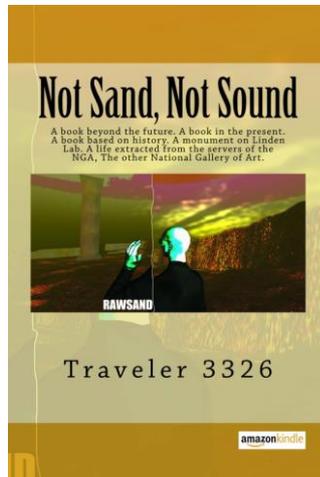
Chapter THE IMPACT OF NO AIR

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> *"What if an avatar gets no air and is choking? If you ask Alfred Hitchcock he would sign NO AIR by himself. The author is doing this by bringing his editor with signing 'speech to text' into scene. But there is a flaw in this story."*
>
> Traveler 3326

THE IMPACT

Simulation is a nice thing when you have a big, big budget. Always the fat machines, the best tools and nice smart cool guys around... a little play here and a little shooting there. We call it reaction test, latency test, but in fact it is just an Ego-shooter. Puff, pang, dang. Who is the daily shooting star? He or, not so often, "she" gets control over the coffee machine for one day, a tradition we keep on running. You don't know the story? I shall bring it as the impact that follows will be a heavy one.

One of our interns at the NGA, yes we have them, mostly if their dad pulls some strings at the top level, get the job to simulate the coffee situation that was once the deal in the Trojan Room at the University of Cambridge, England. This happened during the early days of the internet when the world-wide-web was being developed. You may know it was

in the late 80s of the last century.

This intern, I sadly forgot his name, let the Avatars he had created speak to us via sign to text and sign to speech. He started his presentation with the words, "What if Avatars are in a world where there is no air?"

You need a moment to get the depth of this question.

He continued, "But still need coffee?" Using a cyberglove he made some gestures in the air. "That's ASL," Pea Brain said, or The Pea Brain said, but I don't want to renew this discussion, you know it was Dr. Peter Brain. Then he added as if we were all stupid, "The American Sign Language."

We looked at a simple flat screen, as this task of the coffee machine at Cambridge was really a simple one. For you see, the task had only been given to the intern to keep him busy. Now I remember his name, but sadly I read "name classified" as he is now a Senator so I have to keep it with the intern. However, in the simulator he created an Avatar named n00b42, which I shall assign as my editor's name, but later. For now I will not distract you, I will keep hard on track as ground breaking insights follow on the problem – "what if the Avatars are in a world where there is no air?"

Take a second, or even better, I make space for your insights and leave a page blank.

"THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK."

What if the Avatars are in a world where there is no air?

Got it? Not sure if you did, as even Dr. Peter Brain failed. I did not fail, but I kept my mouth shut. Not good if you tell the solution after you notice your boss did not catch it. So it was on n00b42 to show us the way.

The intern asked the n00b42, "What?"

We saw n00b42 made some signs, moved his hands, stretched his fingers and made a sort of a circle in the air – ok we both know there is no air. The sign showed clearly different to the first ones.

The intern, now with a little anger in his voice, said, "Speak n00b42, what do you mean?"

Again n00b42 made some gestures and then he held a poster into "the air" and on it was the words: "NO AIR."

Now some "ahhhs" filled the room.

"No speech, No air, No speech," was the breathtaking insight by Dr. Peter Pea Brain.

The intern said, "N00b42, start the 'sign to text' interpreter and please repeat your signing." The n00b did as requested. So we got to read what had been signed in text chat and later the same was demonstrated in voice chat. The application's name – "sign to text and sign to speech." A nice patent was the result, as in our society are many who are deaf or hearing impaired and like to use ASL inside the simulator as their native language. Of course, it was also covered the other way, "speech to sign." Even "text to sign" makes sense especially for educational purposes if someone wants to become an ASL teacher.

I did not tell you of the Trojan coffee room, one moment, one moment, I know this book is made to read at the beach so I copy a condensed version of the story from Wikipedia.

> "The Trojan Room coffee pot was a coffee machine located next to the so-called Trojan Room, in the old Computer Laboratory of the University of Cambridge, England, which in 1991 provided the inspiration for the world's first webcam.
>
> "To save people working in the building the disappointment of finding the coffee machine empty after making the trip to the room, a camera was set up, providing a live picture of the coffee pot to all desktop computers on the office network. After the camera was connected to the Internet a few years later, the coffee pot gained international notoriety as a feature of the fledgling World Wide Web, until it was retired in 2001."