

Fake News

Woodrow was fed up with the plethora of fake news—not fake news, exactly, but none of it was real news. The media and web fed on politics and disasters. A fireworks factory exploding was certain to make the nightly news. So was a big flood. The political stuff was full of distortions, the disaster stuff taking only one element from a disaster—the immediate destruction.

The real news for Woodrow was how many homeless there were in his city, how the food banks were doing, potholes in the streets and whether his food or water was contaminated. Local crime was not a big issue but air quality was—Woodrow lived near one factory. What was truly news for Woodrow was both the good and bad of what was going on around him. The rest was fake. People were influenced by fake news, Woodrow believed. And he determined to stop it. How, may you ask? Not a difficult question when you are a psychoneurohackerphysicist.

It is not a well-known profession.

Woodrow figured the media played to what the public wanted: political fireballs, disasters, threats. “Bread and circuses,” he muttered, assembling his devices. Folks needed to know the real news, but Woodrow knew people still needed their diversions. Woodrow turned on his devices and waited, believing it would take a week to work.

It took two days.

That night, on the evening TV news, Woodrow saw a report on food contamination, one on air quality—with the rest of the news a situation comedy. Woodrow switched to highly charged political websites. One had a background report on what climate change was, with a fiery columnist writing about living expenses. Another dropped its focus on past political issues and hunting down culprits and instead ran crosswords, the first having a theme about political witch hunts. There was no longer fake news but real news with entertainment.

The reality of citizens’ lives began to sink in. Disgusted and frightened, about half the population built rocket ships and evacuated to the Moon, where they built a colony where the only news was whether a meteor would wipe them out. The situation comedies remained popular.

The evacuation was ignored on Earth until the meteor hit, then the disaster was covered.