

Mental Dope

Arnold knew the time had arrived come for good mental dope. The nation, unstable, disrupted, needed it. *He* needed it: the prolonged escape only solid mental dope could provide. Recreational drugs were no longer enough—escaping reality had little appeal after you sobered up and there was reality all over again.

The nation's new President came to the same conclusion about mental dope as did Arnold.

His ratings were increasingly underwater, elections were coming up next year and he hated being a loser. Citizens needed to stop thinking about what he was accomplishing, at least until he'd accomplished it (whenever that would be.) He told the networks and streamers to up the ante—and he had ideas.

Reality shows increased, horror film production pumped up. Porn was already available on the web, now the Networks and streamers increased nudity. There were a lot of game shows too. A lot of mindless sf films about evil corporations. The air and electronic waves were filled with fundamental distractions, more than ever before. The final step, the new President's suggestion, were virtual reality headsets to see and experience it all, as if it was in front of you.

(There were also circuses, you could get bread delivered.)

Quickly enough, when everyone went home, and at times during lunch breaks, and certainly all weekend they put on virtual reality headsets to watch and listen and interact. When war games hit the market, citizens could hunt and kill, in jungles and deserts. Everywhere, there was bread.

Arnold tried a headset but found the violence disturbing. Mingling with elephants in the circus was amusing, as was walking on the Moon. Still, it was not real. It was convincing, even overwhelming—but fake.

Arnold put away the headset, shut off his TV and began reading books. It felt comfortable, holding something real in his hands, and he could slip into the worlds of some novels with ease. He decided to quit his job and move to a small island with few people and avoid further distractions. He funded his move by appearing in his own reality show, based on his island life. People in headsets could be him, wander the island and pick fruit from the trees and be back to nature (for as much

time as they paid for.)