

Paper Wait

by Travis Wildes

There are many reasons you could be reading this: curiosity, nostalgia or boredom. The fact that you are reading this means you're being exposed to something long before your time. You are peering into the depths of history.

During this work's original printing in 2010, it was highly regarded by readers. Although I have never written a preface to any of my works, especially a publication as old as this one, times have changed and it has become a necessity to include in any book. What you hold in your hand now is the prefaced edition of my only surviving book, as it was republished in 2183 — nearly 100 years after my death.

In case you're unfamiliar with my career, I started writing during the early 21st century when the personal computer was at its apex. Anyone could write and everyone did, and anyone wishing their writing to be viewed by a mass audience could do so, via the internet. Looking back on this era, most in the literary community (if that term still holds any significance) considered this the beginning of the end for print publications. During this saturated period, user created content existed everywhere. The expansion rate of this material was super-luminous, to put it lightly. Authors not only wrote books, but they had blogs as well. And bloggers had blogs about the author's blog: everyone wanted their voice to be heard. There was a website for everything and any taste. People were orbiting away from being 'readers' and were concentrating on being 'creators.' Stacks and stacks of new data got piled on top of the old data, and as fast as something was new, it was delegated to being old even faster.

The monstrous buildup of content finally reached its peak, when the entire history of the human race — anything and everything that had ever been written, drawn, typed or created — was indexed and easily referenced from any computer on the planet. In the end, though, no one cared about this monumental feat. People had already become too absorbed in their own personal bio-domes of creation. The result was an overload of information and not enough readers. Quality was

also a concern, as published works were still head and shoulders above most user-created material. Authors continued to write books, just as people continued to create their own work on the web. Everything was concentrated in such a high volume that the general consensus was formed that a crash would be eminent. Then, four decades later, AppleSoft introduced their revolutionary word processing program, ThinkWrite.

ThinkWrite used nanotechnology; the same tiny machines that, in 2035, cured the first cancer patient in Switzerland. With ThinkWrite, writer's block was no longer a term that held any meaning, and as far as the act of writing was concerned, the words talent and creativity ceased to exist. How could they? Those astonishing little machines plugged into your neural pathways and extracted the thoughts and dreams needed to produce a perfectly written work. No longer did a vision exist that couldn't be expressed in the written word. ThinkWrite could also translate your work, flawlessly, into any language. After ThinkWrite, no one typed and no one wrote by hand. It's not just that people stopped writing, they stopped talking, too. Everyone on the planet communicated in cyberspace using the universal code of ones and zeros. Language barriers were completely dissolved.

The program was a revelation. It let anyone become a world-class writer. Within two years, ThinkWrite became the best selling software of all-time. It eventually outsold the Bible. This jet-tisoned the publishing industry into oblivion. Individuals such as L. Frank Baum, Kenneth Burke and Philip K. Dick were no longer recognized as icons of literary history. They were all forgotten. ThinkWrite could create any book you'd ever want to read: all you had to do was think it. All physical media, like books, were deemed useless. Print was finally dead. As a side effect, many became sickened by the glut of old printed works that still existed. No one wanted to read these decrepit relics, not anymore, so everyone burned their books. The few books that survived were seen only as a child's curi-

osity or a nostalgic collector's item. No new books were published.

It wasn't until the forming of the World Publishing Association, nearly a century after the crash, that the word 'book' had any renewed meaning. The WPA was formed in an attempt to revive published works as a viable medium. They were a global organization which employed meticulously calculated tactics. In a way it was a success, but at the rate of only one book published per month, it will take decades, if not centuries, to completely rejuvenate what the crash destroyed.

When I received notification in cyberspace about winning the annual republication lottery, my digital-self would have felt excitement had I still possessed traces of human emotion. It should be noted that since no book was published for a span of 100 years after the crash, authors selected for republication are now, for obvious reasons, digitally sentient. So here you read the book from my catalogue that the World Publishing Association has approved for resurrected circulation (according to WPA's 'one work per author' law of 2157). Whether or not you like my work isn't important. What is important is that you're reading someone else's book. These were my thoughts, and although they are from nearly two centuries ago, they have no expiration date. I've noticed that 'writing by hand' has garnered a cult following in recent years (according to recent data), so you may find yourself intrigued and motivated to jot down your own thoughts after reading my work. Maybe you'd like to critique my story, or perhaps you can write a better one. Your own writing may not be perfect at first, but that's the fun of it: striving to become better. This is a concept that ThinkWrite, despite its quintillions of calculations per nanosecond, could never comprehend. Even as I exist now, I can only ingest new information. The lingering ideas and thoughts I can articulate are ones that existed before I was downloaded. Unlike you, I no longer have the luxury of new thinking, so don't take what you have for granted. Why let a program steal the experience from you? Write something, and have fun doing it.

