

Islands in the Mind: Pick Your Own Reality



This scenario is based on the following macro-trends: 1) steady contamination and degradation of the natural environment and natural resources; 2) development of new experiences and "realities" through technology; and, 3) increased use of "designed" environments both for leisure and other activities. The scenario is placed in the year 2005: the facilitator asked for descriptions of a society 15 years into the future).

Global warming and climate change, ozone depletion, and industrial pollutants took their toll in the late 1990s by seriously discouraging tourism and in-migration to the Islands. Because the rest of the world was not immune to global change, "fantasy" corporations used Hawai'i's mystique to sustain "up-scale" and luxury tourist markets by "reconstructing" paradise experiences in huge theme parks, ecospheres, and bubble domes. Furthermore, Hawai'i entrepreneurs dominated early "virtual reality" program marketing with a wide variety of historical and modern adventure realities which helped popularize the new medium. (Virtual reality technology essentially replaced television and virtual reality software and programming "virts" have taken the place of TV shows and movies.)

In spite of the pre-21st Century pristine imagery of Hawai'i portrayed in "virts," daily life in the Islands was at its most grim around the turn of the century. The decline in agriculture, which had begun as early as the '80s, meant less and less jobs in that sector of the economy. Even the growth of deep seawater aquaculture, algae-culture, and other OTEC-related agriculture contributed few jobs to the Hawai'i economy due to automation techniques and robotics. Employment in tourism and services dropped dramatically and in 2005 has leveled off. Employment is concentrated in health care services (eye and skin care and repair services continue to grow steadily), environmental services, legal services for the information/communication industry, and scattered jobs in "living parks" (so-called "people zoos").

In 2005 Hawai'i residents are more nocturnal since the dangers of exposure to the sun and 100deg. F mid-day temperatures mean evening hours are favored for shopping trips, visits to neighboring domes, and walks along the beach (noseplugs required). Travel across the island is done in "smart cars"--the solar/electric hybrid vehicles which have replaced nearly all internal-combustion autos. Hawai'i has actually been a leader in the development of interactive vehicle highways systems (called "smart roads" in the 1990 literature) through the co-development of hybrid car computer control systems and nanocomputer painted divider line guideway systems. Rapid deterioration of pre-21st Century infrastructure resulted in the creation of new, more efficient infrastructure such as "smart roads," self-installing (robotic) fiber optic networks, and compact nanotech water/sewer systems.

Hawai'i's communities have changed considerably by 2005. Most small communities did not survive due to the mass out-migration of the late 1990s and their absorption into larger communities under domes, underground, or under the waters around the Hawaiian Islands. Communities are very protective of their own resources partly due to the greater threat to individual and collective survival and partly due to national political restructuring. Communities now have significant autonomy and exercise great discretion in their own decision-making, compared to even a decade ago. On the other hand, district and neighborhood governments seem to realize the need to cooperate in the face of growing environmental threats. This attitude is mirrored in the increased international collaboration between Hawaiian communities, central government, and businesses and their foreign counterparts.

has leveled off. Employment is concentrated in health care seWhile communities tend to be more cohesive in some ways for the sake of survival, they have become more culturally diverse due to the adoption of individualized, personalized environments, and addiction to the new realities offered by adventure or romance virtual reality programs (or "virts"). As media has become "demassified" (as 20th Century futurist Alvin Toffler put it) individuals have become more autonomous and isolated from others. This global trend has been accelerated in Hawai`i due to the shrinking population and fears of chemical and radiation contamination blowing in from Asia. Leisure and entertainment is increasingly sought through the "virts" which now provide an unlimited leisure smorgasbord of opportunities for experience: real or fiction, created or imagined, in any space or time--a myriad of possible worlds, past, present, or future.

There is less connection between people and the natural world. Many people think less about environmental problems because they spend so much time isolated from nature and focused on "virt" realities. People rely on created experiences to escape the "official" reality and to stay sane. This inner psychic orientation has led to growing narcissism and psychic disturbances. Some now believe that all realities are their personal creations. Pleasure-seeking through virtual reality technology is at its zenith in the so-called "porn virt"--the 21st Century version of Woody Allen's "orgasmatron." All these trends have led to decreasing levels of interpersonal communication and interaction. Romance and sexual "virts" of all kinds are being held responsible for the rapidly declining birth rates in Hawai`i. Family life is more fragmented than the century before. Education still occurs mostly outside the home and it is more individualized given the reliance on computers and virtual reality programming for education. Cross-generation conflict is greater and the values of older people are shared less and less by younger people.

Since the turn of the century the economy has improved. The rapidly declining U.S. military presence here is being replaced by growing "global green army" activities in the region. The cold war has become the battle to save the oceans and the planet, and U.S.-led UN forces have located their regional headquarters here. Less moral countries in need of policing still desperately look to other countries and the oceans as toxic dumping grounds. The movement of UN forces to Hawai`i has improved the position of local environmental businesses which took an early lead in "green business." Other countries now look to Hawai`i for leadership, not only in virtual reality tourism marketing, but especially in environmental cleanup, restoration, and rehabilitation services.

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DRAFT SCRIPT, 15 SECOND VIRTUAL REALITY AD:

[Long Shot:] Green Army platoon fighting an Amazon forest fire... [Sensory:] Crackling fire sounds; intense heat... [Voice Over:] "After a hard day's work in the blistering heat..." [Fast Cut].[Close up:] Sweat pouring down a sooty trooper's face... [Sensory:] Smells of wood smoke mixed with sweat... [Voice Over:] "Plug in to Daring Dave's Downhill Virts..." [Wipe] [Sensory:] Cold wind on face... [Wipe].[Close Up:] Same trooper with rosy cheeks and colorful snow goggles... [Title: bottom half of image:] **MAUNA KEA**...[Wipe: except for title] [Long Shot & Pan:] Down the snow-covered slope; blue ocean and fluffy white clouds on the horizon... [Fade Out:] [Title] [Sensory:] Skiing body movements; cold wind; crisp smell of clean high elevation air... [Voice Over:] "You too can ski the slopes of Hawaii and get away from it all..." [Cut] [Medium Shot:] Rushing downhill; small ledge looms ahead... [Sensory:] Heart rate up; leg muscles

push off and jumping movements; stomach jumps... [Wipe] [Medium Shot:] Trooper on cot inside Army tent... [Cut] [Close Up:] Trooper's face smiling; eyes and ears covered with old-looking Virtset gear... [Wipe] [Very Close Up:] Smile; rosy cheeks (as in second shot)... [Sensory:] Warm inner feeling; cool feeling on skin and extremities... [Fade Out] [Fade In:] **Daring Dave's Downhill** logo... [Fade Out]

<<WARNING.>>

The Surgeon General has found that excessive exposure to virtual reality programming may result in psychosis and non-specific sensory transient dysfunctions (NSTDs)

<<WARNING.>>

TOTAL ELAPSED VIRTUAL TIME TODAY [8/8/05]: 18:55 hours

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