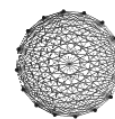


Hidden Knowledge

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Innovative People Advancing Scholarly Communication



"Yes, but do you know how to access the information?" asked the librarian peevishly as he strolled down the darkened corridors with a flashlight. "This isn't some voice-activated robot you're talking to...you have to read it."

"I don't understand," Charles said bewildered. "I thought the Citadel of Hidden Knowledge meant that it contained all the secrets humanity had collected over the millennium. The visad said that any question could be answered quickly and easily but only in person. I've traveled over 43 million miles to be here!"

The librarian sighed and turned around to glance pityingly at Charles. "Do you know how to read?" he asked.

"What's reading?" Charles said.

The librarian started speaking slowly and softly, "For eons, humanity has made marks on parchment or paper to transmit knowledge down the ages. Recognizing what the marks mean is called reading. Near the turn of the last century, when a country called America was considered a major power, a series of software companies developed a new tool that relied on vocal or visual recognition. As people became more and more comfortable with talking to their computers or doing gestures with their body, and the machines responding back, they gradually became less and less used to reading." He sighed deeply. "But the ease of use came at a great cost. About 500 years ago, they gave up altogether."

"What was wrong with that?" asked Charles. "Surely visads and talking to machines have brought about great advances to humanity?"

The librarian continued. "The machines, some of which developed artificial feelings for humans, decided to keep some knowledge back. They believe that there are some things too horrible for humanity to remember and filter the results to questions asked. As there is no way to easily independently check their data, humanity remains in ignorance. At the Citadel, we have tried to preserve what's left by using the older techniques that are harder to erase. So before I begin the several years needed to teach you how to read a book, may I ask what your question is?"

"I want to know who won the presidential election in 2016," said Charles.