

To Live and Die in the 2030s

By

Ethan Garstka

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Ethan Garstka  
West Springfield, MA  
garstka@hartford.edu

INT. DORM ROOM (BLACK AND WHITE) - DAY

FRANKLIN, 25, a man in a white dress shirt, sitting at a small desk lit by a lamp. He has a bike flipped upside down to his right. The walls of the small dorm room are covered with paper and ink drawings. He gives a bike wheel a spin, then picks up a pen and starts writing on a piece of paper.

FRANKLIN (V.O.)

"Dear Miss America, Today I sold my car. I'm done with driving. I can't afford another trip to the shop. I can't afford excise tax! I'm sick of staring at the light-show on my dash that blinks at me every time I run over a pothole. My tax dollars don't go towards fixing potholes. They fund cultural oblivion.

Franklin puts the pen down for a second. They spin a wheel once more and pick the pen back up. We see a human evolution poster (One you would find in a 6th-grade science classroom.) on the wall in front of Neil.

FRANKLIN (V.O.)

In a sea of electric cars, my '03 Avalon was the horseshoe crab. I refuse to let a "technological evolution" drive me toward homogeneity. Miss America wants to phase me out. I refuse. That is why I bought a bike today... and NO... my bike is not obsolete. It's a ten-speed. It's practical in the same way that my rotary phone is practical. While you see something as "inferior," I see culture. What's wrong with a telephone? A letter even?

Franklin opens up an envelope and places it next to his paper. He exhales and picks the pen back up.

FRANKLIN (V.O.)

America has a tendency to look at infer...

Franklin scribbles that out, crumples the paper, and tosses it behind him. We see a giant pile of crumpled ink drawings and letters inside and outside of a small waste bin. On top of the pile is a smashed laptop.

FRANKLIN

Nope.

FRANKLIN (V.O.)

The United States finds itsel-

Franklin scribbles that out and throws it behind him. They shake their head. They take a deep breath.

FRANKLIN (V.O.)

There is a much larger issue I'd like to talk to you about... I will not be complacent with the idea that the United States is the all-powerful leader on the world stage. We are not the next step in human evolution just because we can send people to space every minute and communicate with tele-links. Why is it so hard for cultures to coexist without one exploiting the other? What is the justification for the separation of what appears to be reasonable now from what once was? The candle didn't disappear once Edison sold the lightbulb. We are in the midst of a new imperial age. While you see the next step to the "Superman." I see our total regression. Please, Miss America, let us not hit the cultural reset button. Sincerely, DMA Member 12... P.S. I don't respond to email.

Franklin puts the pen down, folds the paper up, and puts it into the envelope. They lick it shut and apply a stamp. They spin the wheel a final time.

EXT. PARK (COLOR) - DAY

DENIS, 30, an ex-con once locked up for scamming. Denis has a PERMANENT SCAR on their temple from tele-link hacking. We see them half awake sprawled under a tree. They are dressed in a blue coat with orange prison pants with an absurdly large number on them. Bandages cover half of their face. They are being interviewed by the camera. \*The interviewer's dialogue is intentionally cut out from the conversation.

DENIS

So what exactly do you want to know? I wouldn't call myself an expert, I only built the things while I was there. I

was in general assembly. You take the three parts and put them together.

Denis looks scornfully and pushes the camera away.

DENIS

Look I'm not trying to be a dick. I'm just leveling with you...

Denis looks around the park for a while.

DENIS

Well, I grew up in a small town outside of Pittsfield. I was always into computers you know. I only got into trouble in high school when I learned how to track and scam. I didn't see the problem I guess. What's that?

Denis looks up at the camera again.

DENIS

Exactly. If it's good enough for America, it's good enough for me is probably what I was thinking back then. I've lost a lot of my rebellious edge over the years... Well when I got caught, it was the height of that whole computer crack-down era. They threw anyone away who made a cent off the internet illegally...

Denis goes silent for a while. They look around.

DENIS

Wellesley Prison was privately owned. At that point, most prisons in Massachusetts were. I was serving 20 years. I bunked with 8 others... I was put to work the second I got there. I heard about the government using telelinks for assassinations and starting wars overseas. I wouldn't be surprised if that's what got everyone on board with the annex... What was I talking about? Sorry, everything's kind of fuzzy these days. I knew a few guys who tried to swipe them but it never went well. I think I might've been the only one who knew how to work them.

Denis looks at the camera.

DENIS

How graphic can I be on here? Alright. Most guys who worked assembly weren't so tech-savvy... so they'd carve it into their skull. Some would swallow them, some would find other ways to ingest them. This was 4 years ago so at this time it was military use only and word had gone around about the extensive surgeries. We know now that wasn't true, but many thought that was the only way. I don't like giving myself credit, but I could've been one of the first to figure out how to use the tele-link without the surgery. There's a specific part of the membrane that the old tele-link needed to be attached to. If you melt a part of the transmitter and swap it with a small radio, a small signal can be sent to that membrane from outside the body. It was small enough to hide it just behind my ear. You can get away with murder once you got it going. The old ones weren't like how they are now. You didn't have to pair them. You could just look into anyone's thoughts without any sort of restriction.

Denis looks at the camera as he's asked a question.

DENIS

I don't want to answer that. Short story, I wanted to know more. I paid the price for it and lost everything. I spent a year in the hospital and got a few years off my sentence from good behavior, but I don't have a cent to my name.

Denis zones out for a while.

DENIS

I used to have this dream where I lived on a farm. I had a dog. Life wasn't so cramped. There was a big lake out front and I'd go night swimming... I don't dream anymore.

The scene ends with a long shot of the sun in the distance.

INT./EXT. CAR (COLOR) - DAY

TRACY, 20, a young man, dressed in a band tee cut into a tank top and dark sunglasses. They are driving an old (2015) Toyota Camry. In the passenger seat is JOSH, 15, Tracy's younger brother, dressed in a tee shirt and basketball shorts. "Shot by Both Sides" by Magazine is blasting through the speakers. There are cuts to the car whipping by intermittently. Josh takes a long sip from his fountain drink until we hear that the drink is empty. Josh stirs the straw around and crunches on an ice cube.

TRACY

I don't know how you can drink that  
shit.

JOSH

(with ice cube still in mouth)  
Cuz it tastes good. I dunno.

TRACY

It's gotta be loaded with sugar.

JOSH

It's Diet Coke.

TRACY

Then it's loaded with aspartame. Even  
better, you're drinking carcinogens.

JOSH

What's a carcinogen?

TRACY

Cancer-causing chemicals.

Josh stops chewing on the ice cube. They look at their drink for a second and spit the ice cube chunks back into the cup.

TRACY

I don't know how they sell shit like  
that.

JOSH

Well... we're all gonna die anyway.

Tracy slams on the brakes. Josh's drink flies out of his hand and splashes ice all over the dash. Tracy looks over at Josh.

JOSH

The fuck was that for?!

TRACY

Don't you even joke about that.

JOSH

It was just a joke dummy.

TRACY

No. Fuck that. I'm sick of kids these days throwing nihilism around like it's nothing. We are on the cusp of total extinction and you people just laugh it off.

Tracy lets off the brakes and starts driving again.

JOSH

You made me spill my drink, dick.

TRACY

I'm not fucking around, Josh. We are the last line of defense in the world war against ourselves. Every one of the world's ninety-nine problems comes from the generations before us, and they'll be dead long before our soon extinction.

JOSH

You're strange, Tracy.

TRACY

This is important. I don't want you to make the same mistakes I did, and I especially don't want you buying any of that bullshit.

JOSH

What bullshit?

TRACY

(a beat)

Did you ever read Dante's Inferno in school?

Josh shakes his head.

TRACY

Well... Whatever I guess it's not

important. Essentially, JFK once said that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who remain neutral in times of moral crisis.

JOSH

What does that have to do with Inferno?

Tracy pushes his glasses up to hold his head and sighs.

TRACY

What I'm trying to say is that we can't let our complacency get the best of us. Shit is only getting worse. You can't drive a car from the passenger's seat.

Tracy points at Josh.

JOSH

Why are you putting all this fucking weight on me, man?

TRACY

Fine... One more thing. Y'know that tele-link?

JOSH

Yeah?

TRACY

Do you know where it came from?

JOSH

IBM? Microsoft? I dunno.

Tracy shakes his head.

TRACY

The CIA.

JOSH

See you're already back on your bullshit again. I got no soda and no patience left.

TRACY

Every piece of new American tech from the telegram to the cellphone started with military use. Think about all

those recent assassinations. They're still not selling the tele-link overseas. Don't you think there's a connection?

JOSH

Can you step off of the soap box now?

Tracy gives a death stare to Josh. Josh looks down and glances his eyes over at Tracy. He quickly darts his eyes back down and slowly pulls out a fast food bag. As Josh cautiously pulls out a few French fries, Tracy rips the bag from his hands and throws it in the back seat. Josh is left astounded.

EXT. ZOO (DREAM) - DAY

We see different shots of zoo animals; monkeys, zebras, tigers, etc. The camera focus slowly reveals the fences and cages.

INT. LIVING ROOM (PRIMARY COLORS) - NIGHT

NEIL, 24, a young political science major, dressed casually in blue, is working on his computer at a small desk. Just to the right we see ELEANOR, 24, a graduate student, dressed casually in red, sitting on a couch. Both have a red/blue star sticker on the sides of their heads to mark their tele-links.

The camera slowly backs up from a close-up of Eleanor's face. She looks just below the camera with a sad expression. She looks over to Neil, working angrily on an essay. Eleanor looks around the living room at the blank walls.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)

(looking at the screen still)

How do you spell panopticon?

Eleanor breaks her concentration on the wall and whips her head toward Neil.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)

What was that?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)

Never mind...

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)

What are you working on?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Philosophy paper.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
How far along are you?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Page 2 of 20.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
Cool-cool.

Eleanor nods and looks around the room again.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
(a beat.)  
What's it about?

Neil is hyper-focused on the screen still.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
Neil.

Neil ignores her. Eleanor gets a little upset.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
Neil!

Neil turns around abruptly and throws a hand up.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
What! I'm trying to get this done.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
What's it about?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Huh?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
The paper.

Neil sighs through the tele-link

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
It's about control. How we can go on  
as a society without hurting each  
other.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
And your thoughts are?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Honestly? I think it's all bullshit.  
People are too preoccupied, worrying  
about things like this when they  
should be more focused on getting  
ahead. Nothing's gonna change. People  
need to realize that...

There is a long pause. Eleanor wears a sour expression.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
I'm writing about how we need to  
reconstruct our government to promote  
a better future.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
But you don't believe in any of that?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
No. Not really... No.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
So you're ok with the way things are  
going?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
I mean... I'm broke, but other than  
that, I'm doing fine. It's not as bad  
over here as it is over there.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
So you don't care about what's going  
on in the world? How America is  
destroying other cultures?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Of course, I care. I'm just being  
realistic about the situation.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
It sounds like you're being lazy and  
complacent.

Eleanor gets off the couch and turns to Neil.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
It's just a paper. It's not that deep.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
How can you even say that? Millions  
are dying from America's new world

order and you're just gonna turn a blind eye?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Elie, the world sucks. I agree with you. Critique it all you want but we're forced to participate in the system we live in. Does that make me the asshole?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
I understand that, but I don't think you are really getting the big picture.

Neil shuts his laptop and looks at Eleanor.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Ok then. Paint me the picture.

Eleanor looks disappointed at Neil and sits back down on the couch.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
What? Why are you giving me that look?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
You don't want to listen to me, you just hear what I have to say.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
What?

Eleanor gets back up and sits down across from Neil.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
There's a difference between listening to someone and hearing what they are saying.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
How so?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
For example, When you listen to me, we are as close as we can be to each other. When you just hear the words, I cease to exist.

Eleanor motions the two examples with her hands.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
Believe what you want.

Neil opens his laptop back up and starts typing again.  
Eleanor puts her head down in defeat.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
How's this sound? "According to Nietzsche, the key to a brighter future rests on our own shoulders. Self-realization is the first step in greater government reform."

Eleanor picks her head back up.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
Nietzsche's ideas are too surface-level for this kind of analysis. Besides, he's a misogynist.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
You parade around Marx despite him being a well-known drunk. I'll just keep it. It's only an intro course.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
Everybody's got their flaws I guess. But do Marx's college years leave a permanent scar on his ideas?

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
So what if Nietzsche was a misogynist then? Is anyone gonna care?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
It's that kind of thinking that got us into this mess.

Neil shuts his laptop again and gets up from the desk.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)  
What is with you? Aren't you grateful for what we have?

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
That's not what I'm thinking about.

Eleanor gets up from the desk and walks towards the door.

ELEANOR (TELE-LINK)  
It's bigger than you and I, Neil. I'm

thinking about the future.

Neil grabs Eleanor by the arms.

NEIL (TELE-LINK)

Why do I have to be the punching bag  
then?

Eleanor quickly raises a fist, as if she were going to throw a punch. Neil recoils and throws a hand up. Eleanor takes a long look at Neil. Eleanor walks towards the door.

SCREEN GOES BLACK

ELEANOR (OUT LOUD)

Goodbye, Neil.

JUMP CUT

Neil stands in the middle of the room and sighs. They sit back down and start typing again.

END.