

Watch out!

- Leo Bakeland, born on the 14th of November, 1863, in Belgium, naturalized American and well-known chemist of the XXst century.

Through the glass, they catch a sight of a scientist in his forties, bowing over a workbench, manipulating a strange translucent substance thanks to some tools. He doesn't seem to care about his spectators and prefers to focus on his meticulous activity.

- He's famous for his research on photography and plastic materials. In 1907, he developed the bakelite, considered as the first all-synthetic plastic, resistant to heat and isolating from electricity. Plastic was a fantastic innovation because of its durability, its lightness, its chemical resistance and its affordable cost. It affected all industry fields, from food-processing to manufacturing.

On Leo's laboratory floor, enormous rubbish mountains align as far as the eye can see. They seem to move lightly, as if they were floating.

- 1907 marked the birth of Plastinia, the plastic seventh continent created from plastic pollution, which in size represented at its peak twice the surface area of the United States of America. Given that no governments nor international organisation had taken measures to make it disappear or manage it, in the 2030s, it became the land of the homeless people, pariahs and outcasts. Because of its instability, it was responsible of the death of thousands of Plastinians, as they called themselves, and the disappearance of half of the marine species.

Without wasting any time, the guide leads his group to the next stage.

- Alexander Flemming, born on the 11th of March, 1881, in Scotland, British doctor, biologist and pharmacologist, Medecine Nobel Prize earner of 1922 and 1945.

Below a few spotlights, a middle-aged man is standing, with a happy smile on his face, waving his trophee to an invisible audience, showing in his other hand a little blue pill.

- He gained recognition for his bacteriology, immunology and chemotherapy articles. In 1928, he discovered by chance the penicillin, the first antibiotic, revolutionising the medical world. Thanks to Penicillium mold antibacterial properties, numerous treatments were created to cure a large range of diseases.

Instead of a triumphant public, Alexander is surrounded by camp beds. Masked nurses are busy, running between their suffering and coughing patients.

- 1928 marked the appearance of resistant bacterial strains due to the excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics. In 2041, antibiotics for the Covid-19 sickness (an important XXIst pandemic) caused an unfortunate mutation, provoking, within the space of a decade, the death of five sixths of Humanity population. Survivors were forced to wear hazmat suits in their everyday life during almost twenty years.

The guide questions the kids.

- So, children, under the light of these few examples, can you tell me now why we created the ASI-Watch and how it makes Humanity better?

Standing back the secondary class, Bennie winces. He doesn't like these corporate school visits, only meant to brainwash the new generation and make them think that the way society works is natural and irreproachable. An enthusiastic redhead little girl raises her hand.

- The ASI-Watch or "Anticipation System Informator" Watch prevents disaster to happen by simulating all bad consequences an invention can produce. If what you're about to create can be very nocive, it tells you to stop.

- Very good, goes the employee. But have any of you ever heard of the EASI-Watch ?

So they finally started to make it the EASI-Watch public ! realizes Bennie. It was about time...

- No ? It's a new model of the ASI-Watch which will be released in a few years. Let me pitch it to you. The E in EASI stands for Everyday as in "Everyday life". Imagine your father cooking some macaronis for you. Comes the most important part of the recipe: the cheese on top. In the fridge's door, there's a tupperware full of grated gruyere. Without an EASI-Watch, your dad would just shrug his shoulders and use it. But the cheese could be several months old and cause a food

poisoning to your entire family. With an EASI-Watch, the app will remember the time your mother filled that tupperware and warn your father about the danger.

- So it's basically like the ASI-Watch, but not only for scientists ? tries another kid.

- You summed it up perfectly! With the EASI-Watch, catastrophes become easier to watch !

And personal data becomes easier to collect... thinks Bennie, his arms folded, a few steps behind, fulminating about this pathetic real-time advertising.

- Mr. Bennie Hubbard ? asks an employee dressed up to the nines. Mrs. Shelton is waiting for you.

Thanks Lord. The deity finally deigned to grant me an interview.

Following the butler, Bennie gets into the elevator. While ascending the building, he looks through the outside window to the swarming crowd of random people walking around in the street. On some days, he almost breaks down under the overwhelming responsibility which weighs heavily on his shoulders. Do you exist for any other purpose than to piss me off, Silvia?

As they arrive to the final floor, the lift doors opens wide and lead directly to Silvia Shelton's office. She's sitting on her 30K\$ levitating seat and is phoning with someone, without even pretending to be at work.

- You should've seen his face ! I showed him my card and it shut him up ! Ahh... Guys...

While the steward leaves Silvia's ivory tower, Bennie sits down in front of her desk and patiently waits for her to finish her enthralling conversation. He once waited twelve minutes without saying a word until she noticed his presence. But this time, she quickly ends her call and turns towards him. That's unusual. Perhaps she's taking the matter seriously, for once.

- Isn't that my favorite employee, my little Bennie? How are you? Still with that Spanish guy... what was his name, oh, Pedro? Have you decided to take the plunge? I can't wait for your wedding invitation! It's a great guy. I always thought he was the right one for you.

Liar. Last time she saw him, she took him for a "Mexican server" and asked him for some tequila. Bennie limits himself to nod.

- Oh Bennie, Bennie, Bennie... So reserved and yet so efficient. Do you know that the exact moment we had to choose a supervisor for the ASI-Watch, your profile immediately came to my mind ? Back to highschool, you always were the smarter one. You know, I think that joining the Anticipation Group was part of the best decisions you've ever made.

Definitely not. Calling back his last ex certainly would have been a better idea. And that's no small talk.

- Your job on the ASI was magnificent. You made sure that the final version was as perfect as possible and you managed this project masterfully. It was a remarkable commercial success. Confident in your abilities, we transferred you in charge of the EASI-Watch program. And then... some problems occurred.

She stands up, her hands crossed, and gazes at the skyline through her patio door, holding a gold pencil with a carefully studied detachment.

- We received some reports. About your behaviour. Apparently, you're resistant. Refractory to the smooth running of the EASI conception. You question the possible excesses. In a nutshell, you put a spoke in my wheel. Now it's your time, Bennie. It's your chance to explain yourself before I fire you.

I would be a lie to deny it, she goes straight to the point. Bennie swallows difficulty. To step aside would be a contradiction with all his moral code. But he cares about his work. His team was everything to him. To think that there's might be a mole in his entourage dedicated to tell to Silvia his real intentions behind his back is terrifying him.

- Go on, Bennie. Explain yourself.

- Silvia...

Oh fuck it, he'll give it all.

- When I first heard about the EASI-Watch, I was puzzled. Selling the ASI-Watch to professional scientists at full price is one thing, selling thousands of EASI-Watch at an affordable price is another thing. Why would a such skinflint as you make these kind of philanthropic initiatives ? So I

did some researches in your accounting. And I found what really hides behind it. Every EASI is connected into an enormous real-time web, whatever you're doing, whenever. Which leaves the door open for a flourishing Data market. You intend to sell personal Data of the customers to the highest bidder, without caring what they plan to do with it. For an human being, buying EASI will be equivalent to sell its freedom. So go on, Silvia. Explain yourself.

She hadn't stopped scrutating the urban landscape. To Bennie's astonishment, she simply starts to laugh. With her thundering, unpleasant and unbearable laugh.

- Was it just about your ethical code? Your rock solid morality? To think that I believed you worked for our competitors... I don't give a shit to what you think is the best for our customer's lifestyle. That's not part of your job. You know what? Catch this.

She throws in her back the pen she was playing with and Bennie grabs it at the last second.

- In front of you, you will find your resignation letter.

Dumbstruck, he bends over her desk and realizes she's not bluffing.

- It only awaits your signature. If you're against the EASI program, I want you to sign it right now. Otherwise, leave this office and throw your chivalrous ethics in the bin on your way.

Thirty seconds later, she hears Bennie standing up and walking away. She smiles. He had'nt not signed it.

- I never want to hear about this again, Bennie. Just do your work, as expected.

Three years later.

- Dears viewers, welcome to the launch ceremony of the EASI-Watch! shouts the noisy host on the microphone. What a great day to finally start this project, which took over 6 years to develop by the Anticipation Group! For those of you who lived in a cave in the last 5 months, thanks to the tremendous success of the ASI-Watch, the Anticipation Group took it to the next level by creating a new model adapted to everyone's daily life. Thanks to an agreement with the government, they managed to provide an EASI-Watch to each inhabitant of the entire country! According to our estimations, almost half a billion citizens carried out the procedures to obtain it!

Without abandoning his cheerful voice, the host catches up a radiant business woman standing near his side.

- I've got the honor to introduce you to the lady behind all this project, Mrs. Silvia Shelton!

- Thank you, Caesar, for this wonderful presentation. I will not monopolise the floor, but I just wanted to give you glimpse of the life all of you will discover in a few minutes. In this life, you won't suffer from bad decisions. You won't create accidents. You will no longer suffer for your imperfect comprehension of the world. You'll never be the problem again. How? It's simple: there will not be problems anymore! I just want you to remember... With the EASI-Watch, catastrophes become easier to watch!

- That perfectly concludes our speech! Dear viewers, hold your watch because the EASI program will be officially launched in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... And that's it! EASI-Watch is finally operational!

Silvia opens the door with so much force that it almost breaks the hinges. Furious, she interrupts the reunion and ignores all the members of the EASI team to directly yell at Mr. Hubbard.

- What the fuck, Bennie? she shouts, showing her high-tech watch.

Bennie raises an eyebrow.

- Is it the volume that disturbs you? You can reduce it, you know? We all do this when we're working, to keep our focus intact. Stevenson, show her how to mute the watch.

- Don't play dumb with me, dickhead! Explain to me why my watch never stops speaking!

She throws it to Bennie. As it rolls over the table, a robotic voice articulates:

- *Level 3 alert. You left the TV set without explanations. Your reputation will be damaged if you do not excuse yourself publicly. People will consider you as a millionaire scammer and will cancel you on every social media. You'll be ruined. I repeat : Level 3 alert. You left...*

- Every EASI-Watch never stops talking! The host's one told him to stop cheating on his wife, broadcast live !

- You know, Silvia, we have set a factor in the system app of EASI-Watches. We called it the “Anticipation Depth”. When Anticipation Depth is set to zero, EASI-Watches limit themselves to make some obvious observations about your life, like “turn the gas off”, “watch out the water spilled on the floor in the bathroom”, “don’t forget to do the grocery shopping”... When Anticipation Depth is set to one, EASI-Watches cover all kind of suggestions on your personal life, no matter how intrusive they are, like “put your grandma in nursing home”, “stop jerking off and find a job”, “stop being a jackass with your ex”... And you know what? I set Anticipation Depth on ten.

- Why didn’t you tell me? asks Silvia to an apprentice around the table.

- I haven’t told it to anyone in my team. They didn’t know my true intentions. But that’s a shame you’re Silvia’s mole, Stevenson. I really liked you.

- Everyone, whispers Silvia. Get out.

Except for Stevenson, every member of Bennie’s team has a smile on their face. This was the Bennie they chose to work with. Not some Silvia’s poodle.

Once alone, Silvia starts to raise her voice.

- SET THE ANTICIPATION DEPTH TO ZERO!

- I can’t. No one can. I made sure during the conception that the value cannot be changed.

- TAKE THE NETWORK OUT OF SERVICE!

- I can’t either. The launch took the form of an IOS update. There is no backdoor to disable it. The only way would be to set the Internet down, but neither I nor you want this to happen.

- YOU LITTLE FILTHY SCUMBAG! YOU RECKLESS BASTARD!

Silvia stops for a second and tries to breathe calmly. Seeing him continue to type on his keyboard as if nothing happened only made her angrier.

- Why? Why have you done that? To prove yourself you’re a great man? Was it all about your reluctance to the Data market?

- Oh, you mean the time you’ve told me to fuck off with my ethical codes because I cared about the use of customer Data? No, Silvia. It’s not just that. You need to picture it bigger. Since I’ve started to work in the Anticipation Group, I asked myself a lot of questions. I was in charge of the ASI project because I believed in it. The report was as simple as possible: since science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers freedom, we have to make sure to compensate this weakness by anticipating all potential excesses, unexpected consequences and bad decisions. Then the EASI idea popped out. Once again, the idea was factual: let’s transpose the Anticipation technologies to the everyday life context! But shouldn’t we apply the ASI procedure on the EASI idea? What could be the bad consequences of developing it? There are plenty. By anticipating daily life problems, we remove in each of us the risk-taking tendencies. We would become idler zombies, unable to think by ourselves and we would take pleasure in normal life, with no evolution and nothing out of the ordinary. Everything would be where we expected it to be. And that would mean the end of our Humanity as we know it. I refuse that.

Silvia’s limbs are shaking like crazy. She seems like she would either be collapsing in on herself or explode and make the building disappear in few seconds.

- Bennie Hubbard, you’re a dead man.

She runs towards him and grabs him by his neck. While violating him, she screams her head off :

- WHY DO YOU KEEP BEING SO DESPICABLE? I HATE YOU! YEAH I ADMIT IT, I DON’T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT HUMAN CONDITIONS AND ETHIC CODES AS LONG AS IT MAKES ME RICH! I’M THE MOST SKINFLINT PERSON YOU KNOW AND IF EASI-WATCHES HAD GIVEN TUMORS TO CUSTOMERS, I WOULDN’T MIND AT ALL! LET ME BE EGOISTIC!

Suddenly, she has a very strong premonition. He’s not responding. He knew she would lose her mind. Once again, he’s the smarter one.

- You’d better check my watch, he succeed to articulate between his broken teeth.

She takes it off his wrist. This watch too doesn’t stop speaking.

- Level 4 alert. You should immediately stop your livestream. You risk being fired. I repeat : Level 4 alert...

In panic, she lifts the flap of Bennie's computer. And she sees herself. On a national livestream. 250 Million viewers. She's screwed.

While Silvia breaks down, Bennie manages to stand up. With the little strength he has left, he stamps on his EASI-Watch and crushes it. Hobbling, he gets closer to the patio door and looks at the urban landscape. Now he feels relaxed and calm. He's in tune with himself.

That's the world he wants to put his hopes in. Not a boring world without problems. Not a tasteless world without errors. But a world with the willing to make it better.