

iMug frenesia

The City.

The sky slowly colors itself under the rays of the rising sun, and already, far off on the horizon, its silhouette and that of its towers take shape, rising like spires toward the sky. From my hill, far away, I gaze at its roads, black like swarms of crows, its concrete sidewalks like waves of foam, its apartments, its stores.

The City now shines in daylight, casting the multicolored reflections of its buildings for miles around. From here I could smell and savor the scents of greenery coming from the parks, as well as the sea air drifting from the harbor.

But that is not why I came.

Twenty years earlier, in that same City...

It all began on a Saturday, as I recall. I was sitting in a pub, and like every Saturday, the professor that I was drank his coffee while reading the newspapers. Of course, it was a rather ordinary activity, but I had grown used to it, so much so that this moment, perfectly normal for some, had become for me the one moment of the week when I could be at peace...

I did not know it yet, but that was the moment when everything changed.

“Hey Charles!” shouted a voice I knew well.

It was Ted Champ, a colleague who in life had three passions: mathematics, technology, and bothering others. His messy hair, poorly kept shirt, and awkward gestures often earned him a few jokes from the others, but never out of real malice, since his eternal good mood was quite welcome in difficult times.

He was a friend to me.

“Look what I found!” he said, sitting down (and spilling my cup of coffee in the process).

He was holding a mug, ordinary in appearance except for a button on its handle. When Ted pressed it, to my great surprise, the entire curved surface of the cup lit up with a navy-blue background, on which floated the various typical applications of modern smartphones.

The iMug, the first of a new generation of objects, was born.

I remember laughing at my friend’s excitement over this “revolution,” as he tried in vain to explain the importance of being connected every time he drank his coffee.

But I was wrong.

First, the trend of connected devices took hold among my students, who in the following months all tried to get their hands on that famous object, which some said marked the beginning of the “connected” era. Then adults too began seeking out these new means of connection, eventually abandoning their old phones for these so-called connected mugs, which most found “really stylish.”

And like the cellphone, the iMug soon found its way into every pocket (which was actually quite funny when you caught a student playing on his mug during class and he desperately tried to slip the cup into his pocket to hide it). So now everyone had their own mug somewhere, and the trend seemed to be in full swing.

But it had nothing to do with fashion.

After the iMug, other similar objects appeared: the iRing, the iBag...

They multiplied at an incredible speed, showing up in every pocket, every bag... And after a while, they were everywhere.

My second conversation with Ted was very different from the first. This time, we were both sitting down to talk. Many things seemed to have changed about him: his hair was now neatly combed, his clothes carefully ironed. But that wasn't the important detail.

On him, I could count with the naked eye a DOZEN connected devices! During the beginning of our conversation, he did not speak to me at all, checking his messages on each of his gadgets. Then, realizing that I was watching him, he turned them off, looking embarrassed.

Our conversation was brief.

His mind had changed as radically as his appearance, and the joy he once carried within him had vanished, leaving only a burning desire to be connected and online at every moment. His dreams of travel and meeting people had faded as quickly as his phone battery.

I felt that his view of the world had changed: he warned me that some people were wandering the streets at night and that one should no longer go out after dark, because according to him, some had become capable of fighting to the death to steal the slightest connected object. I tried to reassure him, but it was useless, and he urged me, fear in his eyes, to listen to him.

I then promised, faced with his insistence, not to go out with any mug or connected device. That promise saved my life.

I remember going out a few days after that famous conversation to go to the library, a place that was becoming deserted, to consult a textbook for the high school. The afternoon was already well advanced, but it was not yet twilight. So I entered the small library with its slightly old, colorful bricks. I greeted Germaine, the librarian who was used to seeing me among the dusty shelves. She was a kind-looking old lady who seemed to know the shelves by heart, reminding me of my grandmother, who had given me my love for reading.

So I began searching through the old aisles for the book I was looking for, and for a while I thought I wouldn't find it, until finally my hands brushed against the soft cover of the book.

It was the last time I would ever be able to touch one.

After a few hours spent copying the exercises that seemed interesting to me, I decided to leave. The street was now deserted, night beginning to fall. That surprised me at first, but when I saw them, I understood.

A group of men dressed in black were crossing the street and seemed to be heading in my direction. At first, I didn't sense the danger, and it was only when they were about twenty steps away that I noticed they were armed. I then remembered Ted's warnings about the "gangs" that roamed the streets at night.

I understood that I had to run... too late.

I barely managed to take ten steps before one of them grabbed me, and in less time than it takes to say it, I was pinned to the ground by what felt like hands of iron, which began searching through my jacket with the speed and frenzy of desperation. In vain, I tried to struggle, but one of the brutes holding me struck me sharply in the face.

In the cold, with hands turning and twisting me like a bird of prey circling its victim, I caught a glimpse of a few blurry faces that seemed familiar.

I lost consciousness.

After my assault, the number of connected devices only increased. Every inhabitant of my city now carried two or three ways to stay connected at all times. Connection had become permanent and essential for everyone.

So, in one last attempt to convince my friends and everyone around me, I decided to disconnect for a week from all the devices I had bought under Ted's influence.

It turned out to be terrifying.

No one spoke to me anymore, at the high school or in the street. When I called out to a few friends to talk, they didn't even lift their eyes above their cup, watch, or electronic device.

Disappointed, I eventually reconnected. That's when I noticed the messages in my inbox.

It was overflowing.

All of them were worried about not being able to reach me by email. Some, even among those I had called out to in the street that very morning, thought I had disappeared and were hesitating to report me missing to the police. I realized then that during the short time I had voluntarily been outside this addictive network, I had vanished in the eyes of the world.

Reality had disappeared without anyone noticing.

That was when I made the decision to leave the city.

During the months following my departure, I lived with my parents, who were farmers and delighted to have someone there to help with their work. At first, I struggled to detach myself from my old life and isolate myself from the world. But as the days passed, I grew to appreciate the simplicity of working the land and found again the peace I had missed so much since the day I was assaulted, which had left its mark on my mind.

And then they came.

First a friend, then two, then three, four... all of them also leaving the City that had become unlivable, where connection had ended up devouring everything in the minds of its inhabitants. They came, as I once had, to reconnect with reality. And so my parents' farm first became a group of about ten members, then a large gathering, a village, and finally a new city...

But this time, without the internet in our lives.

In the brightness of morning, I watch my old City from afar, finding my memories in the life I once had. The remains decay a little more each day, the concrete crumbling, the bridges eventually collapsing, ivy struggling to cover the gray walls. Yet the shape of the place has remained mostly the same, except for the doves that have now made their nests on the rusty antennas that will never serve again. Deep down, I know that all of this will eventually disappear, that future generations will likely have nothing left to remember our time.

Thus, Man, who seemed to have reached the peak of his evolution by creating the internet, his masterpiece of communication, had himself built and expanded this network until it ultimately smothered its own creator.

And Man, in all his advanced evolution, intelligent as he was, chose, just like his first ancestor, to flee from danger.

Internet.