

# Future Taal

*"the future has never been more fun or interesting than it is now"*  
-future FORTUNE magazine

The train of the 3XN Underground Line gave a short, hissing sigh, stopped humming and nearly noiselessly came to a halt at the Piazza Iacomini station, only the softly rumbling thunder of the wheels and the metallic clacking hammering of the rail gaps accompanying its slowdown.

With a deep, equally soft sound of the signal klaxon, the doors unlocked and then opened, allowing the young man to exit the silverish, perfectly polished vehicle while an unintelligible male voice announced the station name and possible connective trains from the station.

The traveller looked into both directions, glancing over the near-empty platform - except a young woman at the very end of the train, no one but him had gotten off the train here-, spotted the exit he sought and hastened towards it while the train noisily closed its doors and left the station with the same sound of the same klaxon echoing through the station.

Passing a group of benches and information monitors, he heard someone shout, but didn't attribute this to his own person and continued his stride towards the exit. Again, someone shouted for him to stop, and this time the young man stopped and stood still, waiting what would follow now. He heard an indefinable assortment of peculiar sounds, and it wasn't long before the source of this racket was standing before him - or rather, bending over; hands resting on the knees from exhaustion; flat, racing respiration making the torso heave uncoordinatedly; the whole person shaking with the thundering percussion of the infuriated bloodstream's galloping storm through the veins.

It was the girl. The traveller stood there, irresolute, impatient - not out of curiosity, more driven by the desire to get the matter at hand over with and reach his destination - while the young woman, after having recovered *some* from her phreidippical endeavour, still panting, asked him his name.

He couldn't help but smirk derisively. Of course; he had anticipated that. The oldest trick in the biz'.

She repeated her question - and it was only now that he noticed the thick accent accompanying her wheezing utterance - while staring insistently at the ground, blushing even more than it could be accounted to the physical fatigue.

Probably - no, most likely, she was not from here, he pondered. How could she know, his trail of thoughts continued, and how could he help but hear her out?

Of course, it was all too logical; as a foreigner she wouldn't know about the Lifetime Enrichment Programme; that of every hour of your life, five minutes were preserved for interactive, personalized - individualized to fit your income, likes and duties - 'realistic-situation-real-life infomercials', which would try and sell you a product, a service, or just quality time.

That he had grown weary and cynical from all the advertisements of this type he had watched during his life (although he preferred the -albeit washed-out- 'cute girl' theme which was usually employed by Dating Agencies, Washing Powder Manufacturers and Lifestyle Food Designers to the gory and eerily themed ads of the Insurance Corporations, which tried to make clear to you what a gruesome end it could take not to be making use of their services), was surely not her fault - and how could she know that he had, unlike most, paid close attention to pay his Lifetime Rights Management fee to

keep the advertisement ratio at the 5 minutes per hour required from birth on. If you wanted more free time, for example, you could easily buy yourself holidays or just a day off; but you were required to pay for it: Either in the form of advertisement minutes per hour (up to 55 minutes of advertisement per full hour were possible), or in the form of additional working hours. When your 55 minute limit was maxed out, you had to either "buy ad time back", by working additional hours; and when on top of that your daily working hours limit of 49 (they had long ago legally stretched the duration of a day to 50 hours, to allow for longer and more efficient working times) was reached - or if you refused to work the hours you were supposed to - the legal system would take care of you.

That simply hoarding free time was no use; you had to spend your allotted free time either by taking a maximum one month per 50-month year (they'd wisely changed that too, to make the math easier) or by selling free time on the Free Time Stock Index for money; money which would be expire within one month if you didn't spend it on one of the products advertised to you via the Lifetime Enrichment Programme.

That the only way to escape the hellish drumfire of enriching information was to never buy free-time; to only work exactly the working hours required at birth; to always buy the

first, most bearable rubbish advertised to you and be done with it. That only this way, the life of work and sleep and more work and less sleep, starting after the short education and continuing unto the Inanimate Matter Reprocessing Centre was somewhat bearable, because that way you could hope to sometimes even dream during the few 55 minute intervals of sleep at night (naturally, even during the few sleeping hours every night, the ads wouldn't cease; contrarily they'd become more loud and obnoxious to really wake you up to their message, and because during that time they wouldn't be disturbing your work productivity and could really goof off).

He sighed and was about to go for it - what harm could it possibly bring - and tell her his name, when she - gaspingly - also requested his phone number.

A broad smile ran over his face - he had been right, after all. Since the five required minutes were over, he more or less carefully pushed her aside, and strode on, towards work, cursingly thinking:

*Just another data miner, again.*