

THE BEAUTIFUL FUTURE



It is 2028 in the suburbs of central Florida and Ava is a junior in high school. A prototypical digital native, she is awkward and introverted in person, but leads a rich digital life. She doesn't question her artificial world until Francis bursts into her life. His perspective incites an awakening in her heart and mind that carries the series.

The Beautiful Future is a story of formative first love, and the impossibility of letting it go, set against the backdrop of a society battling between techno-optimism and a return to the organic. Emerging technologies like regenerative medicine and automation are the catalyst for conflict, and the drama unfolds as our characters explore new moral dilemmas that the evolving technological landscape bring.

Ava and Francis's relationship is fueled by issues related to privacy. First as young and infatuated lovers, with secrets exploding out of a diary, and later as wary exes, trying to find their way back to each other but distrustful and hardened in their attitudes.

When we first meet Ava, she barely thinks about privacy, and in fact conducts most of her life over an internet connection (as does most of her generation). Francis is diligent about spending time offline and paying attention to the ways digital life manipulates and controls people. Their arcs regarding privacy cross and polarize over the course of the series, as they shed idealism in different ways.

Francis grows up and out of rebellion, in order to progress career-wise. Ava views this as submission, and making up for lost time, develops into a radical offline advocate. With Francis as her initial muse, part of us wonders, if it isn't all for him.

The arc of Ava's mother exemplifies this struggle between on and offline existence. She becomes a celebrated creator on a virtual reality platform, 'Dream House.' As she slowly grows addicted to the game, we watch her real house and life fall into disrepair.

The characters in the show all suffer from 'neo-nostalgia,' with the world moving so quickly, the ache for what is left behind is constant. Ava and Francis escape this through each other, and their secret hopes for a future together. Despite trying to move on in their own ways, pervasive technology keeps them always connected.

As the series progresses, the stakes increase and the world broadens, culminating in the final two episodes of Ava's story being modeled after the real life story of Aaron Swartz, a programmer and internet activist who committed suicide while under federal indictment for alleged computer crimes. His story is haunting, and Ava is our ghost, her idealistic pursuits elegiac, and her impact on Francis indelible.

The series is both a celebration and a warning, the feeling is binary. Being afraid of technology and in awe of technology, feeling the fragility of humanity alongside its strength. The Beautiful Future walks the tightrope of this dichotomy, a tightrope set against a lilac sky, the humming of a server farm heard in the distance.





Format

Time

The series spans nearly a decade, as we jump into Ava's life and her relationship with Francis at pivotal moments of their 'emerging adulthood.' 'Emerging adulthood' is a newly recognized phase of the human life span that happens between ages 18-25. As life spans lengthen with improving healthcare technology, developmental phases shift and blossom.

The ebb and flow of their love story allows us to chart the universal struggles of this new developmental phase, and the technology that facilitates it. They are like sine waves, falling in and out of sync, and the structure of the episodes allows us to feel that rhythm.

Polyptych

The show is designed to be shareable. Within episodes, there are music video sequences and fables. Structured like a nesting doll, with many of the stand-alone components begging to be viewed on repeat, the structure is suited to the current sharing climate and serves as commentary on it. By at times shifting the focus to satellite characters, the series acts as a polyptych, where pieces can be enjoyed individually, but together create a grand whole.

Documentary

After the end of each episode there is 3-5 minute mini documentary. It is paramount that the world of the story be "science prediction" as opposed to science fiction. Following the narrative there is a closer, real life, look at the doctors and scientists working on the technology showcased in the episode. We learn where it stands currently, and why what you saw is likely to occur. Similar to how after a biopic, often you see footage of the subject.

Main Characters

Ava

We meet Ava at age 17, she is an outsider with her head in the clouds. Outwardly she seems ordinary in every sense of the word: average looking, middle class, suburban. She spends most of her time inside role-playing games and when interacting in the real world, is only half there. She enjoys the control and creativity of living through an avatar as opposed to the limited real world. She is mildly synesthetic/autistic and very sensitive, another reason it is easier to stay in her shell. She is a late bloomer and at 17 remains very childlike.



Francis

Francis on the other hand, knows exactly who he is when we meet him. He is a gifted programmer, passionate and outspoken to the point of extremism about open source software, privacy, owning your data and living offline. He has the confidence of someone who has always been the smartest in the class. His independent learning and interests make him irreverent and playful towards authority and public education. This strong sense of self was born out of necessity. When he was seven, his mother left with his baby sister, abandoning him with an alcoholic father. He is now looked after mainly by his maternal grandfather, who owns an auto body shop where Francis works. As self-driving cars are rendering the shop obsolete, it is frequented now mainly by wealthy "sport" drivers - a source of disdain for Francis.



AVA (cont.)

Francis is her inciting incident, as a realist he awakens in Ava a more proactive approach towards her life. She takes this approach and runs with it. We watch as the sensitivity that forced her inward, electrifies her new experiences and pursuits. She develops into an activist and seeker of authenticity. We experience this decade through her; reading the books she reads, wrestling with vanity and authenticity, finding purpose through True Democracy and friendly AGI, and falling in love with Francis again and again.



Golden

is the classic mean girl prom queen, repackaged for the digital age. She sees life as something to be conquered and imagines herself repeating her high school success in college, law school, and then as an intellectual property lawyer like her father. She is forward thinking and intelligent but lacks intuition and the idealism associated with youth.



Virginia

is a ray of light. She comes from a large Puerto Rican family and values family and taking care of other people. Despite that she is a bit of a wild child. She lives more "IRL" than most - but not to make a point - just because she naturally values and seeks out human interaction. She has grown up with Nice Guy Dave and Francis and quickly becomes Ava's first close girl friend.



Nice guy Dave

has been best friends with Francis since they were in elementary school and has developed as his quiet shadow. His parents are more doting and tuned in than most parents of digital natives, undoubtedly because of their mutual decision to live offline. They allow Dave to live online, and believe he should make his own decision.



Beth

is Ava's mom. She is the breadwinner and perpetually cheerful. She has climbed the corporate ladder of pharmaceutical sales, but has always imagined herself an entrepreneur, waiting for the right idea to strike with. She married a particle physicist and although they are compatible don't connect very deeply. They live alone together, and when Ava came along she lived the same way. She doesn't usually notice that she is the only one talking and rarely seems to "turn off."

Trinidad

is as charismatic as they come. He is considered the final success story of the startup culture from the first two decades of the 2000's. He is focused on creating products under the mantra of "buy it for life," believing planned obsolescence to be one of the largest evils of capitalism. He is a frequent guest on news and talk shows, where despite usually contradicting the hosts he charms them. He wants to make positive social change - but also views the world as absurd and beyond repair.

Jereme Dean

is a comedian and a social prophet, in the style of Bill Hicks. His voice presents an acerbic critique of "like" culture and other social absurdities and injustices the changing technological landscape brings to American life. He is battling a blood disease and does not have the funds or social connections for access to regenerative healthcare. For the majority of the series we only meet him through pieces of his stand up performances, Ava watches them religiously. Eventually, Ava meets Jereme while spiraling through a virtual reality of her creation. Without the air of cool his sunglasses and black and white performance footage provide, he appears tired and brittle. They meet in a nondescript green room that has the feeling of "god's waiting room."



Concepts

DREAM HOUSE - was born from a tumblr and Pinterest merger after ownership of the Oculus Rift became ubiquitous. It is a “virtual dollhouse” and social network. The experience is highly addictive as users have access to virtual possessions they are unable to afford in real life. In “In The Clouds” after gaining social ground Ava is invited over to several girls’ Dream Houses and is surprised to find them nearly identical in their opulence. Her mother slowly becomes addicted to the game, and throughout the story we see her real house fall into disrepair as she becomes something of a celebrity for her designs within the Dream House network.

ALTERNATE INTERNET - Alternate internet is a dream for Francis. He believes corporations and politicians have robbed the internet of its freedom and original intention. He and his friends talk about laying new pipe and creating an alternate internet where they can all live someday. After switching schools, he creates a miniature version of this as a project for school. This project ultimately leads to him being hired by a digital security corporation. This is a large spot of contention between he and Ava: she believes he sold out, cashed in on their dreams.

HEADIFY - music streaming software that works with MC. It plays music so that only you can hear it, but without the use of headphones. Late in the season, Francis hacks into Ava’s headify and blasts music while she is speaking at a conference.

SMART ADS - As the U.S. struggles with skyrocketing unemployment rates in the new digital economy, advertising becomes more invasive and intelligent. The ads take on a near prescient quality. For example, information from a biometric mood ring noticing your dehydration and alerting a refreshment company to advertise to you before you feel thirsty. The advertisements become another way to communicate with the audience about our characters inner thoughts and motivations. As the show progresses, the advertisements become more pervasive and cleverly disguised. They respond instantly and seamlessly to stimulus.

NO-NETS - are remote areas set up specifically to have no wi-fi connection, satellites or surveillance. Francis and his friends hang out regularly at a no-net near his house. It is mainly anarchist type kids with a desire to live “off the grid,” a last bastion against nearly ubiquitous internet.

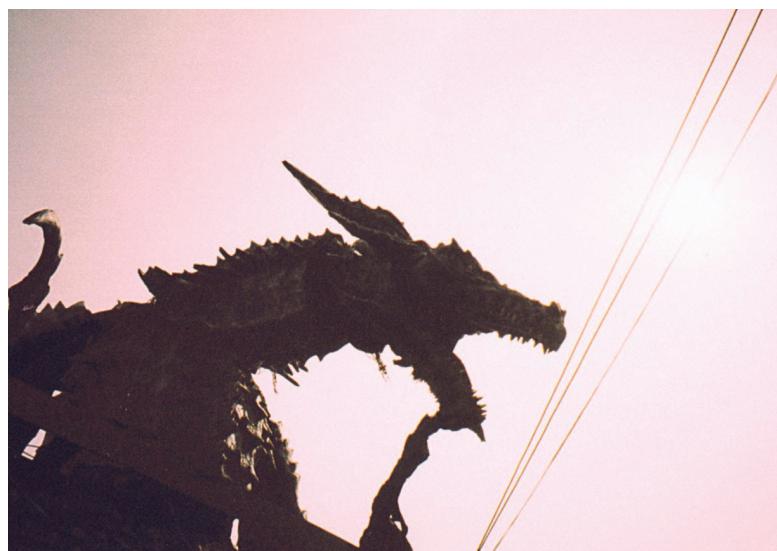
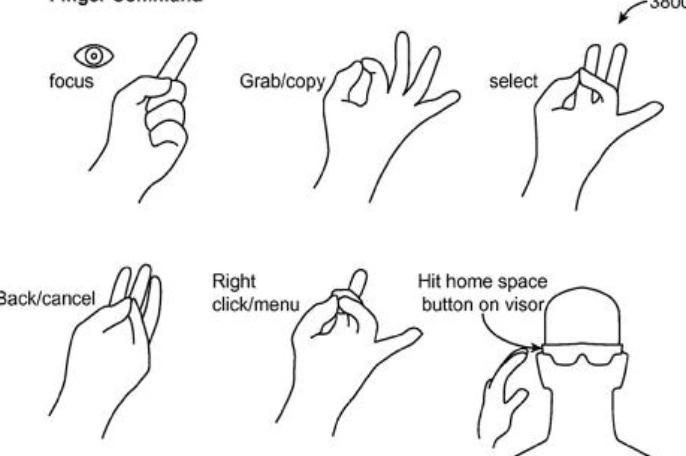
TRUE DEMOCRACY - True Democracy is a political movement, an attempt at a truly representative democracy. Constituents are electively monitored in order for representatives to act and vote precisely on their behalf. In the beginning of the series it is a radical movement but over the course of the decade we see it gain traction and begin implementation.

MC - stands for mind chat. It is a messenger system that when activated allows messages to come in and out of your field of view. Although not yet capable of communicating thought, the system is incredibly sensitive to minor mouth movements and facial gestures.

DINOSAURS - a form of slang for almost anything built before pre-digital life, but more specifically abandoned artifacts. Empty strip malls, cars no longer allowed on roads, CDs, encyclopedias. As the show speeds up, new products more rapidly become dinosaurs or "dinos". Can also be used as a derogatory word to refer to someone who is dumb or slow.

IRL - stands for "in real life" and is a term used frequently by teenagers in the show. Being born digital natives, much of their communication happens digitally and "IRL" is often associated with awkwardness. Inversely, when Francis first meets Ava, he pushes her to become more "IRL," believing it to be synonymous with an authentic existence.

Finger Command



HIJINX - non-profit developed by eccentric entrepreneur Trinidad Aims to restore wonder in the world and to battle what he perceives as the evils of advertising. He buys advertising slots and creates ads aimed mainly at kids (and our audience), to advertise positive morals and discourage materialism. Hijinx is also known for large scale anti-authority pranks, conducted in a lighthearted manner.



Episode Breakdown

IN THE CLOUDS PART 1 (year 2028)

Francis is the new kid in school, having transferred from a nearby high school in order to enroll in the engineering program. He befriends Ava and they rapidly fall into intense puppy love. It is a sexual and mental awakening for Ava. He introduces her to radical ideas, No-net zones and living offline, and she shows him how “in color” her world is. Intimate videos of them surface and circulate at school, and Francis believes Golden is responsible. Ava allows him to believe this, worried what will happen if he discovers she uploaded them.

The technological themes explored in this episode are privacy, ‘internet of things,’ digital citizenship, and net neutrality. The research is based on the work of Mary Lou Jepsen, Mikko Hyppönen, and Kevin Polusen.

ISOLANDS (year 2028)

Ava is hiding in a book because she is being publicly shamed at school, and Francis isn’t speaking to her after discovering she was responsible for the videos being made public.

AVA: I couldn’t help it. I didn’t mean for anyone else to see.

FRANCIS: But you put it online.

AVA: But on my unedited, and it’s just because like, if I don’t put it there, it feels like it isn’t real or didn’t happen or something.

FRANCIS: When you put it online, it belongs to everyone. Which means it isn’t anything, doesn’t belong to anyone...

As she reads the book, “Isolands,” we are taken into the story.

Isolands is a loose adaptation of “The Awakening” but set in the year 2065. Kate and Charles decide to take their honeymoon in a space hotel. With an average life expectancy of 140 years, Kate begins to question if she has made a mistake committing to over 100 years with the same person. Her anxiety is heightened by being trapped inside the glass hotel. She befriends Zulily, the 13 year old daughter of a wealthy businessman and they explore the hotel and her decision together.

Ava stops attending and a guidance counselor approves her switch to a neighboring school. Her new high school (the one Francis previously attended) is in a much lower socioeconomic class, and is not an Apple school. She is shown the ropes by Virginia and Nice Guy Dave. Francis is excelling in the engineering program and begins to build an “alternate internet” with the help of Golden.



As we watch “Isolands” we are seeing it how Ava sees it. Romanticizing the parts she romanticizes, making heroes of the characters she relates to.

The technological themes explored in this episode are space tourism and extended life expectancy. The research is based on the work of Sonia Arisson.

MANNA/ROBOTS -not yet titled- (year 2030)

Francis is recruited by the digital security company, Halcyon, and moves to Melbourne, FL, where their campus has taken over the industrial area of Cape Canaveral that used to house the Kennedy Space Center. Ava is incredulous at his decision to do so, she views it as ‘selling out.’ Ava attends college and becomes involved with the True Democracy campaign. Nice Guy Dave works at a restaurant that switches to total automation. Ava and Dave begin working together closely on a campaign for workers rights in a time of automation. Dave admits he has feelings for Ava, but she is still in love with Francis. Ava seeks an advisor for her political ambitions in Trinidad Aimes.

The technological themes explored in this episode are a digital economy, automation, basic income, drones and 3D printing. The research is based on the work of Jaron Lanier and Richard Stallman.

REGENERATIVE MEDICINE -not yet titled- (year 2033)

Virginia's mother, Claudia, is diagnosed with esophageal cancer and Virginia is amazed to discover the regenerative medicine options available. Tasked with having to come up with the money to pay for surgery, she decides to enroll in a social surrogacy program. She carries the child of a woman who for aesthetic reasons does not want to endure pregnancy. Francis discovers a large vulnerability in the operating system of a product about to ship, and is torn between alerting Halcyon and exploiting it himself. He tries to talk to Dave, his oldest friend and confidant about the decision, but Dave is distant, feeling guilty about his pursuit of Ava.

The technological themes explored in this episode are regenerative medicine, Brain-computer interfaces, social surrogacy, medical ethics. The research is based on the work of Dr. Stephen Badylak.



SHE WAS IN LOVE WITH A COMPUTER (year 2035)

Ava is living at home after college, and commiserating with a pregnant Virginia. She develops feelings of deep paranoia, regarding her work with True Democracy and seeks help through an online therapist, Sam. They begin talking nearly constantly, and Ava begins to fall in love with him. Francis attends Virginia's 'baby shower' in part to see Ava, but she avoids him because of her involvement with Sam. When Sam unexpectedly disappears, Ava begins a quest to find him that ends with her discovery that he was an algorithm.

The technological themes explored in this episode are artificial intelligence and digital therapy. The research is based on the work of Luke Muelhauser and Steven Pinker.

INTELLIGENCE EXPLOSION -not yet titled- (year 2036)

The world is abuzz with news of an AI "hard takeoff" scenario. The takeoff began in China and speculation about machine communication is on everyone's tongue. Ava plans to move to San Francisco to work for MIRI, attempting to secure human values/societal benefit for long term AI. She speaks at a fundraising conference in Orlando and Francis surprise visits her. When she gets in her car to leave, despite her input it drives her to his house. They reconnect and he tries to get her to stay in Florida. She reveals to Francis her paranoia but he dismisses her fears.

The technological themes explored in this episode are machine intelligence, whole brain emulation and ubiquitous internet. The research is based on the work of Ben Goertzel, Elizier Yudkowsky, Douglas Hofstadter and Nick Bostrom.



STATE OF THE ART (year 2037)

Beth, “dizzylizzy”, has become a celebrity in the Dream House world and entirely addicted to the game. Francis takes a new job at Halcyon, testing military strategies using virtual reality. Ava meets up with Trinidad who gives her designer digital narcotics. We enter a virtual reality spiral where Ava’s thoughts change the world around her and the stimulus takes us on a path through her past and present and fears and dreams. Along the way we spend time with Jereme Dean, Ava as a child and her still hopeful future with Francis.

The technological themes explored in this episode are virtual reality, augmented reality and digital narcotics. The research is based on the work of Chris Milk and Ikrima Elhassan.



IN THE CLOUDS PART 2 (year 2038)

Alone in San Francisco Ava has grows increasingly paranoid about being surveilled. Multiple attempts to tell Francis about this have been “intercepted.” She visits her mother in her Dream House, despite having sworn off virtual reality. Ava plans to go home to Florida to break her mother off of Dream House. She is detained at the airport and placed under arrest for violations of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. Trinidad bails her out and she is allowed to return home to await trial. She, Virginia and Dave revisit their old No-Net.

Francis realizes he has been subjected to VR torture in the form of falsely implanted memories, some regarding Ava. He plans to buy a car and pick Ava up to drive to the Keys. Believing she is faced with a jail sentence or worse and feeling hopeless Ava walks to the top of the Sunshine Skyway. Francis speeds towards her, driving a car for the first time in his life, as she leaps from the bridge and falls through the clouds.

The technological themes explored in this episode are entropy, multiverses and simulacra. The research is based on the work of Jaan Tallinn.



Style

The look of the show is cinematic and lush, with a music video/fashion editorial feel. Style references are films like *Wild at Heart* or *True Romance*.

The series will be poetic science prediction. Often in science fiction, attention to tone, nuance and the delicacy of human interaction is overlooked in favor of clearly communicating ideas. This is a love story, shaped by science and technology, told through complex, vivid characters and small human moments.

As the series progresses the tone becomes more absurd and unhinged. Advertisements address the audience directly and lines between real and simulated reality become less clear.

The pace and intensity of the show will speed up over the course of the series. It will start out moving quickly, but with each episode the pace increases as attention spans shrink. This culminates in the second to last episode “State of the Art” which plays like a rapid series of youtube videos. The final episode slows back down slightly, taking on a dreamlike quality.



THE WORLD

Normal sci-fi. A version of what the world will very possibly look like in fifteen years. Here is what high school will look like with self driving cars and refrigerators that talk to you. Here is what falling in love is like aided by technology. The show is considered “hard science fiction” as the technology and predictions will be based on current research, but will highlight the everyday as opposed to the extreme.

FLORIDA

The story is set in Florida because in Florida things grow like wild. Nature is not neatly contained, strong grass breaks through the foundation of an abandoned home, or heavy rains rust out a car in the span of a summer. The struggle between wildlife and civilization is visible everywhere in Florida.



Add to that the isolation of being misperceived by most of the country, the rotting dreams of the space coast, rows of vacant homes after the housing crisis and rampant gambling among the elderly and it starts to feel like another planet. Parts of Florida feel like derelict mining towns with exotic birds living among the remains.

The otherworldly feeling is heightened by the color palette, watercolor sunsets in soft purples and pinks and every shade of green. This will be an insiders look at Florida, presented as a beautiful loner, misunderstood - not unlike our heroine.







COSTUME

The costumes in the show reflect the adoption and rejection of trends speeding up. Although the clothing in the film is fashion forward, it is created out of recycled imitations of pre-digital life. Additionally, having the show take place over a decade, we show the cyclical nature of taste - a dress of her mothers Ava hates in episode 1, ten years later she is wearing in episode 8.



Themes

(Each of the episodes aims to explore themes specific to the technology being presented, the following themes are present throughout the series.)

PRIVACY

In a time where most people have traded their privacy for convenience or exposure, what remains sacred? Who has access to your information? Do corporations that own a lifetime of your data, supercomputers and advanced predictive algorithms essentially own a copy of you? Does civilization benefit from a more transparent society? When we first meet Ava, she hasn't considered these questions at all, and Francis is a privacy advocate. As the series progresses, he becomes employed by a digital security company and changes his view, downplaying the power information holds and advocating for transparency. This causes the rift between he and Ava to widen, as they begin to represent opposing schools of thought on the importance of privacy.



VULNERABILITY

Most people are more honest with their search engines than with their closest friends. The amount of information we divulge to the machines in our lives, thoughtlessly often, is staggering. We highlight that vulnerability. Ava's increasing paranoia illustrates how reliant we are on software and technology we don't fully understand or know who is controlling.

VANITY/IDENTITY

As accessibility to share your life and your self increases to a near live feed - does the desire to be known and seen increase along with it? Is this a desire for closeness and understanding, or new heights of vanity and narcissism? When sharing becomes so excessive, is anyone even watching? As it becomes easier and easier to share who you are - does it become increasingly difficult to know who you are?

SIMULACRA

In "On Exactitude in Science," Jorge Louis Borges writes of a civilization building a map the exact size of the empire it is meant to represent, that covers the land point for point. That feels very relevant today as we move farther and farther from an authentic existence. A moment remembered based on the photo we took to represent it as opposed to what the moment itself contained. Often this is viewed negatively, focusing on what we lose by existing this way. In The Beautiful Future we will explore not only what is lost, but also what is gained: the power and control that come from authoring your life as opposed to living it.



Why this story?

Because everyone loves to fall in love. Having your heart and mind lit up by someone is almost as universal as the pain of heartbreak that so often follows. By charting this classic cycle over a new developmental phase, and in a world that doesn't quite exist yet, we give the audience a chance to examine the current technological climate and the social implications of where things are heading. To see into the future, based on the now, and contemplate what they accept and reject about it.

Is the technology we are becoming reliant on helping or hurting our most sacred relationships?

The title is meant both earnestly, and as satire. The story is both cautionary and hopeful. Ava is our thoughtful explorer, navigating heartbreak, identity, and a new world. She is standing in a phosphorescent ocean and beckoning to us, holding a sign that reads,

Welcome to The Beautiful Future, everything is amazing.

and thinking to herself, I love you I love you I love you.

