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VAST 231: Don’t Buy This Book

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My Fellow nostalgians, students, teachers, book-ies, hipsters, and whoever else it may concern,

 I have come to you today to warn you that there exists among us a foreign object. An object so new and fresh to the eyes of our generation. An object of great capacity, speed, and convenience. An object so small, yet with such evil capabilities. An object that lurks in cyber space, awaiting its major takeover. This object has weaseled its way into the innocent hands of many in our society. Yet I do not think that such buyers are aware of its severity. But let me tell you now, this object has the power to obliterate the entire book world as we know it. Spread the word to everyone you know, and let the whole nation be aware that this foreign object…is an e-book!

 Now I’m sure a lot of you are wondering about my last claim: how e-books have the power to rid the world of books as we know it. And although I can not predict the future, there is significant evidence to back that claim. For example, recent statistics have shown that, in November of 2010, only 6 percent of Americans reported owning e-readers of sorts (Huffington Post- Ebooks More Popular Than Ever); however, in 2011, e-books *more than doubled* in popularity, even *outselling* hardcover, adult fiction books for the first time (Kearney)! In addition, the percentage of Americans aged 16 and older who read e-books grew from 16 percent in 2011 to 23 percent in 2013; while, on the other hand, the percent of readers of traditional books *dropped* from 72 to 67 percent from 2011 to 2013 (Huffington Post- Traditional Books on Decline)! But if that’s not convincing enough evidence for you, all you have to do is pay attention to your surroundings; whether you are in a school setting, at a public library, bookstore, or park, on a bus or plane, or even simply just walking down the street- look up and around you and you’ll be surprised. You’ll be surprised with the number of people- men, women, *and* children, reading not from paperback or hard cover books, but rather from computer like, electronic devices, e-books.

 I don’t know about you, but it pains me to think of a bookless world. No more flipping through pages ingesting that musty, yet comforting book smell; no more highlighting, underlining, or writing notes to yourself in the margins of pages; and no more handling of the book itself- feeling its weight, seeing its size. And those are just the little things that would be missed. There is so much more at stake!

Can you imagine your childhood without bookstores or libraries? –Having to search online for books of interest. Not being able to walk up and down the isles, immersing yourself in the atmosphere of each section, picking up and putting down books of interest- flipping through pages leisurely taking your time to pick out your top favorites. I know, as a child, one of my favorite parts about going to the bookstore or library was sitting down with a book in the special reading areas that most bookstores and libraries have set up for children. Surrounded by wallpapered walls of familiar book characters, sitting in my favorite, yellow, beanbag chair, I was in my element. This time was so special to me because, quite frankly, I couldn’t get this experience anywhere else. Now think about your own children- don’t you want them to have those kinds of memorable experiences and connections with books? Is it fair to deprive future generations of such magical moments?

But if we do not act soon, it may be too late to save books from disappearing all together. In regard to contemporary book culture, Jeff Gomez claims, “while print is not yet dead, it is undoubtedly sickening” (Striphas XVI), meaning that, as Ted Striphas quotes, “the era of printed books is nearing its end” (Striphas X), and that “it’s time to move on” (Striphas X). With that in mind, I’d like you to close your eyes and refocus your imagination to a world without bookstores or libraries. That instead of libraries or bookstores, with shelf after shelf of books to browse though, decorated walls to immerse yourself into the reading mindset, and helpful librarians to interact with you about your book choices, there stands only a mere computer.

Now open your eyes. And to be safe, you may even need to take out a pencil and paper to jot a few notes down, as the rules are pretty strict. On this computer there is access to thousands and thousands of e-books at the click of a button. Now that may seem quite impressive, but this access, to say the least, is extremely limited. Not only is it a completely different experience- looking at books virtually, as opposed to in person, but get your pencils ready for this: there is a time limit in terms of how long you can look at each book. Yes, ladies and gentleman you heard me correctly: there is a time limit for how long you can look at a book on this computer e-library or e-book store. And that time limit is a mere ten minutes!

If you go over this ten minutes, the library, or you, are automatically charged for the e-book. Now to the adults out there, this rule may not seem so bad. But again, think of your children! How can you expect them to be able to look at a book for ten minutes, virtually, and know if they want it or not? I know when I was younger I used to spend hours on end at the library and at books stores until I could make up my mind on what to bring home. And that was after being able to physically flip through the pages and study all of the pictures (whether they be pop up or regular). It’s almost cruel to put a time limit on children’s viewing time of books. I know that I can speak for myself, and probably most of you, when I say this: as a child, I really needed to make a connection with a book before I knew I wanted to bring it home with me. You just can’t rush things like that and you should not have to! Thus, we must not let e-books take over, putting time limits on our experiences and connections with books!

Another loss that you must be aware of if e-books take over is the loss of book sharing. What I mean by book sharing is that you will no longer be able to pass around good books that you have read to your friends or family without in turn also giving them your e-reader (which obviously is not ideal). In this sense, the idea of the e-book is so backwards and ironic. The book was created to spread knowledge and the evolution of the e-book was designed to even further that spread. However, quite obviously the e-book is not doing its job of spreading knowledge as flawlessly as some may think.

Money, as opposed to the spreading of knowledge itself, or the reader satisfaction seems to be the central focus for publishers and companies that sell e-books. Creating e-books so that there is no way to share them with friends or family definitely maximizes profits for publishers and e-book companies. But going further than that, have you ever stopped to think about what would happen if the company backing your e-books went under? In his book, *The Late Age of Print*, Ted Striphas gives the example: “In the event that Amazon.com went under…the content of your kindle would essentially be imprisoned there” (Striphas XIV). Simply put, you would lose everything! With books, once you buy them, they are permanent; and you never have to worry about some outside source taking them away from you without your permission. However, with e-books, following Amazon’s slogan, “‘books in 60 seconds’ just as easily could mean ‘gone in 60 seconds’” (Striphas XVII). So why support a product that is unreliable? Why support a product that is backed by greedy parties that could care less about customer or reader satisfaction? And why support a product that has changed the purpose of books from the spreading of knowledge to the influx of money?

The bottom line is, the literary world is on the brink of major changes. With e-books becoming more and more popular and paperbacks becoming less and less popular, it is obvious that it is not looking up for us pro-book supporters. If we do not spread the word of the dangers of e-books, I’m afraid that Jeff Bezos, the founder and CEO of Amazon may be right in his claim: “No technology, not even one as elegant as the book, lasts forever” (Striphas IX). But let us all come together and prove him wrong! Let us join as a nation against the spread of this foreign object that lurks in cyber space! Let us stop the popular trend of this destructor of magical experiences and connections! And let us fight to rid the world of the e-book and to let live the classic, beloved book!

Works Cited

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