

SUBSISTENCE

By

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FADE IN:

The film opens to a black background with blue letters that read:

Subsistence (n.) (s b-s s t ns)

1.The act or fact of maintaining or supporting oneself at a minimum level

2.The means of doing this

The previous words disappear and more words show up on the screen and scroll down. They read:

In the year 2021, new drugs are tested and approved that allow the user to transition into periods of augmented reality, a temporary, parallel world in which the natural laws of the universe are bent and the user's perception of reality branches into an alternate state of being. Two factions have been created: Purists, those who stand to preserve the consistency of a natural and present life, and Users, those who fight for the creation of virtual planes of existence. For the users, the drug is an escapism. For Daniel Webb, it was endurance.

The title "Subsistence" appears on screen in blue font and disappears.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

DANIEL, GUY 1, and GUY 2 are inside of a really small, bad apartment with white paneling and a red sofa in the middle of the room. A bunch of teenage, stoner types are sitting down. One of the friends walks up to another person.

GUY 1
Hey man, you got the Zos?

DANIEL
Uh, yeah, I have it right here

He pulls out a blue bottle from inside of a coat he is wearing. Inside it are a bunch of different colored pills.

GUY 2
Uh, give me a green one.

GUY 3
I'll have one too

DANIEL hands him a pill

(CONTINUED)

GUY 3 (CONT'D)

Oh man, get ready to see sparks
fly.

They all take the pills at once. We are transported to a purple haze where millions of orbs circulate around the people and they walk along a narrow bridge leading to a glimpse of black, starry space. Angelic, gospel noise is heard and the music rises to a higher pitch.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Afterwards, the drug trip ends and the friends exit the apartment. Tired, DANIEL sits down on his sofa and turns on the television. There is a woman interviewing him and we find that Daniel is a scientist.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

MARIE

Hello, I'm scientist Marie Lane. Today we are talking about the raging debate between Purists and Users and the nature of Zosimos. Here joining us today is the creator of Zosimos, Daniel Webb. So Daniel, explain to our audience how Zosimos works and your thoughts on the debate. The ethics involved with the use of Zos are quite complicated, wouldn't you agree?

DANIEL

In part, yes.

MARIE

Can you explain to our viewers how Zosimos works? Shall we say, the pills "nature"?

DANIEL

Well, before you can understand Zosimos one must understand first the nature of the entheogen and what I refer to as the neo human paradigm. An entheogen is a substance that essentially allows the user to enter the epitome of their inner self and realize the nature of the infinite universe and their connection to it. Entheogen

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (cont'd)
basically refers to God entering you. To ingest an entheogen is to ingest Gods power. It is an experience outside oneself that permeates the body and grants access to parallel experiences coexisting with our current reality. What's unique about this is that the experience to me is entirely intangible, it is a purely existential and spiritual process. What Zosimos does is allow the user to witness that experience and bend it to the desires of their choice.

MARIE
Tell us more about the intangibility of entheospace.

DANIEL
Well, another area of intangibility is that these experiences take place while the user coexists in the natural physical world, but its relation to our normal, everyday experience is not codependent on it. It is an entirely separate phenomenon. In a way, it provides a kind of dissonance between the two worlds, that can only be experienced by the user itself while having no real effect on those around him or even any physical effect on the user himself.

MARIE
So then in a way, being that it is an intangible, dissonant experience, one could argue that your product, in reality, does nothing?

DANIEL
(laughs)
Well, not really. Not sure I agree with you on that one.

MARIE
It certainly gives people a different side of life than they might be used to, would you agree with that?

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

Oh, absolutely. Now, in order to understand the debate one must also look at the neo human paradigm. This is where an old evolutionary paradigm of calculated cause and effect is changed for a new, more intelligent consciousness. While the old paradigm is based on simple evolutionary change, the new paradigm is based on morality and the growth of the individual. Those who deny the Purists believe that Zosimos provides this next step in the neo human paradigm, allowing the user to change the course of actions willfully through their own internal thought and inner communication.

Suddenly everything is completely still and frozen.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Daniel sits on his couch. We find that the footage of the interview we've seen is being played back on a television instead of happening in real time. Daniel's head lowers a bit as he remembers an-

EXT. FIELD PROTEST - DAY

A small group of protesters gather around a building with signs reading "Down With Zosimos". They are also in the presence of Users who are for the drug. The Users wear shirts with an inverted "Above the Influence" logo (a circle with a downward-facing arrow inside), signifying their cause.

PROTESTOR 1

Down with Zosimos!

PROTESTOR 2

Zosimos is a scam!

MOB OF USERS

(chanting) Freedom- of- use!
Freedom- of- use!

The Purists are seen emptying bottles of Zosimos onto the ground and crushing them with their feet. The Users scramble to stop them.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Daniel resumes the program

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

WOMAN

But you also said that these planes
created by Zos are dissonant.
Doesn't this discredit the
non-purist argument?

DANIEL pauses slightly

DANIEL

I suppose it could. Howev--

The sentence is cut off when-

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

In present day, Daniel presses a button on his remote. A DVD-like disk comes out of a system attached to the TV marked "Marie Lane interview" with an old date on it. Daniel turns off the TV and sighs, now dissatisfied with his product.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

A girl in a small bedroom with two mattresses shifts around her mattress while laying down with a blanket around herself. This is RACHEL. She gets off the mattress and yawns. She walks barefoot out of the bedroom and peaks her head out from behind the wall in a swerving motion. She is wearing a white shirt and long athletic-type pants that sway softly and easily. Her body has a somewhat slender build. She has long hair, and she tilts her head to the side, causing some of her hair to fall behind her face. She approaches a fridge which is in an-

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - NIGHT

The ends Rachel's pants slide along the ground as she opens the door to the fridge, which is in a kitchen adjacent from the living room where Daniel is still sitting on the couch. She bends over and peers into the fridge, moving her hand around.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
(tired)
You're still here.

RACHEL
I guessed I missed the party. Did
you have a good time?

Daniel doesn't respond, but tilts his head down slightly.

DANIEL
Trouble sleeping?

RACHEL
I got hungry. Hey, do we still have
the leftover food from last night?

DANIEL
Yeah, in the back.

Rachel reaches into the back of the fridge and pulls out a bag. The words "McDonalds", can be seen on the bag. She reaches in the bag and pulls out a half-eaten Third-Pounder. She takes a small bite out of it.

RACHEL
Do you want any?

She hands the burger out with her arm. Daniel picks it up and eats a small amount of it, then hands it back to her.

DANIEL
Yuck.

RACHEL
What?

DANIEL
Do you know what's in those
burgers?

RACHEL
Meat, lettuce, tomatoes...

DANIEL
Sunset yellow, ponceau 4R, sodium
benzoate, 78 different chemical
food additives.

RACHEL
You're the scientist. I'm just a
fan of cheap hamburgers.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
And you know what's in the chicken?

RACHEL
What?

DANIEL
Certainly not chicken. It used to be.

RACHEL
And what is it now?

DANIEL
It's a pink factory paste, it basically resembles slime. They do it now because it's cheaper than using actual chicken.

RACHEL
So what?

DANIEL
Nothing, it's just...

RACHEL
Just what?

DANIEL
It just tastes fake to me.

Rachel takes another bite of the burger and puts it down on the table.

RACHEL
I can't taste the difference.

Rachel finishes the burger and throws the bag in the trash. She walks into the living room and looks on the floor next to the TV. There is a DVD case on the ground. She unzips the case and flips through it. Inside are several white disks that have been labeled with a black Sharpie.

RACHEL
(sighs)
Why do you do this to yourself, Dan?

DANIEL
What do you mean?

RACHEL

Every night it's the same thing.
You have your friends over, drop
some Zos, and then when they leave
you won't come to bed with me.
Instead you sit night after night,
replaying old memories.

DANIEL

Important memories.

RACHEL

Maybe they are important, Dan. But
you can't live in a bubble forever.
I won't let you. I can't see you do
this to yourself.

Rachel picks up the remote and pauses the program that Daniel is watching. She ejects the disk from the player and holds it up to her face. The disk reads "Zosimos preliminary hearing, United Nations Embassy, October 5th". Daniel has his face pointed down at the floor.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Give it a rest, Dan. You owe it to
yourself.

Daniel looks up at Rachel.

DANIEL

Do I?

Rachel leans down and kisses Daniel on the cheek. She turns off the living room light. Daniel lies down and drifts to sleep. Rachel is seen beginning to enter another room.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

With the bathroom light on, Rachel looks at herself in the mirror on the front of a cabinet above the sink. She opens the cabinet door and reaches for a pill bottle. The label reads "Zosimos- EN31". She fills a cup with water and swallows two of the pills, one red and one blue. A haze of red mist fills the room as we see the vision that is taking place inside Rachel's mind, which is an-

EXT. PARK - MIDDAY

Daniel and Rachel sit on a bench eating food and drinking coffee. What they are saying cannot be heard, but they are talking, and laughing. Rachel's vision becomes muddled and immediately it disappears and is replaced by-

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Rachel's face and head tilt and she smiles lightly to herself. She enters an-

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rachel goes back on the mattress and places the blanket around herself, and drifts to sleep, still smiling.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Daniel is wearing a business suit and is sitting in a waiting room. Two men exit a door in front of Daniel's. They finish a conversation quickly one of them departs.

MAN

Daniel, come in.

Daniel enters the office with the man who is Daniels boss.

DANIEL

You wanted to see me?

BOSS

Yes.

DANIEL

Did your superiors look at the EN32 formula?

BOSS

That's what I wanted to talk to you about. We checked your formulas. We checked, we double-checked, we ran it through our best people. We've come to a conclusion.

DANIEL

And what's that?

(CONTINUED)

BOSS

You need to go over them again. The benzyl chloride concentration you included is too strong.

DANIEL

I'm just trying to do what I'm asked, sir.

BOSS

Do you watch movies, Daniel?

DANIEL

What?

MAN

Movies, motion pictures.

DANIEL

Yeah, sure.

MAN

And when you go to see a movie, do you know why you are going?

DANIEL

To be entertained I guess.

MAN

Movies are an escapism. They allow us to live through other worlds and vantage points, to be free of the mundane boredom of a normal life and *let go*. And that's what Zosimos is designed to do.

DANIEL

I'm still not hearing of complaints, sir.

MAN

You've written out a highly concentrated dose of benzyl chloride, to the point where the DEA has pre-classified Zosimos EN32 as an amphetamine.

DANIEL

So it will make people more focused.

(CONTINUED)

MAN

And that's the problem. The people who take Zosimos don't want to be "focused". Not on their own lives. They want to live in the movies. At the movies, for but a few hours, we get to sit back, relax, and forget about our problems. And that's what we're here to do.

DANIEL

With all due respect sir, I don't want us to forget about our problems.

The man tilts his glasses and looks down at his desk. Daniel begins to exit the room.

MAN

Do you mean to tell me that you're quitting? You may have given us the Zos patent, but you still have to listen to other people. And this isn't your decision to make.

DANIEL

(stopping in place)

This was always my decision to make.

Daniel starts to walk out the door again. He stops to turn back to his boss.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

It's not about the concentration. It's about how you synthesize the chemical. I have the formula right here.

Daniel pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket. The man tries to reach for it, but Daniel swipes it away from his hand.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I was going to give it to your superiors...

Daniel places the paper back in his pocket.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

But I've had a change of heart.

Daniel exits the room casually.

(CONTINUED)

MAN

Daniel. Daniel, come back here.
Daniel!

INT. BUILDING - DAY

Daniel walks along a hallway confidently

INT. OFFICE - DAY

BOSS

(muttering to himself)
God dammit.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Daniel sits on his couch, but he is no longer watching old recordings. Instead he is watching a sports broadcast. Rachel enters the room holding plastic bags full of food.

RACHEL

I got the groceries.

DANIEL

Did you get the milk?

RACHEL

(looks)

Oh, shit. I forgot. I'll run over now and get it. It's only a couple of blocks.

DANIEL

Stay. I want to talk to you.

Rachel puts down her bags.

RACHEL

(accepting but hesitant a bit)
Okay.

Rachel sits down next to him and notices what's on television.

RACHEL

(smiling)
You seem different today.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
(surprised)
I do?

RACHEL
You seem...*happy*.

Daniel has an unaffected look.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I had a vision last night we were
at a park. We talked, and laughed,
and I couldn't tell what was being
said, but I knew. That we were all
right.

DANIEL
That's good.

RACHEL
My fantasy came true.

DANIEL
I guess it did.

RACHEL
You don't seem so trapped today.
You seem freer, more open. It's
like you're finally you again.

DANIEL
I've changed. Changed the way I
look at things. I don't know if
it's for better or for worse. All I
know, is that I want you to stay
there with me. Wherever it may take
us.

RACHEL
So what now?

DANIEL
(slightly pausing)
Subsistence.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END.