STEVE COLE

NEW YOU FOR EVER



Illustrated by Chris King

"Thrilling, thought-provoking and terrifying"
CHRIS BRADFORD

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For Saskia

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This story
takes place
in the year
2070.

But it could
happen
sooner than
you think.

CHAPTER 01

Save the World by Living For Ever!

You see the chapter title above? It's bold, huh? Makes you want to find out more. Draws you into the story. Right?

I really hope you're nodding right now. Cos my job is to make a story sound good.

Even a wild and scary story like this one.

My name is Anders Jones. I'm not super-smart or anything, so I was kicked out of school at fourteen to help my dad with his TV news show, *And Finally*.

And Finally is a big show that goes out twice a week. I help Dad think of all the ideas and help set up the video shoots.

Together, we've made *And Finally* a big success. It's won Best Factual Presentation for the last two years. Probably because it's the only show offering a bit of *good* news. Dad and I try to show that happy stuff *can* happen. That there are reasons to be hopeful.

Enough reasons to fill a five-minute show twice a week in any case.

A lot of major TV channels run *And Finally* at the end of their main news bulletin each Friday and Sunday. It's like the news is a grim meal that tastes bad, and *our* show is a sweet treat you get after. It's meant to leave a happy taste in your mouth.

Last week, we shot a piece about the floodwater around St Paul's Cathedral, which is home to a newt everyone thought was extinct. The week before, we interviewed a woman who's raised the only remaining Scottish wildcats. That was one of my favourites. Those wildcat kittens were so cute!

But this week, my dad says the show needs to be about Pleekas again. This is weird cos we've covered Pleekas five times in the last three months.

"You have to understand, Anders," Dad told me. "I was born in the 2020s. Back then, Artificial Intelligence was everywhere. Code that could think for itself. But the code couldn't *feel* anything until we got the hang of Artificial *Emotional* Intelligence a bit later. And that changed everything."

Dad's right. It *did* change everything. It made Pleekas possible.

But what *are* Pleekas?

Read on. I'll fill you in.

CHAPTER 02

Hopes, Dreams and Data

The name "Pleeka" comes from the word "Replicas". Well, it does if you say it funny.

Reh-PLEE-kuhs.

I should write it Pleeka™ really, cos it's a trademark of the New You Foundation. But I won't cos it would get annoying.

Pleekas have been around for almost twenty years now. I guess the idea of replica people made sense – rather than fill a person with artificial organs bit by bit, their mind is put into an artificial body instead.

That's what a Pleeka is. An artificial body made of fake flesh that looks just like the old you. Or you pay extra to look better than you

did! Apparently, the body feels like the old you too, only in peak condition – all the time.

If you had the desire – and the money – you could transform yourself. Like a puny caterpillar turning into an eternal, beautiful butterfly.

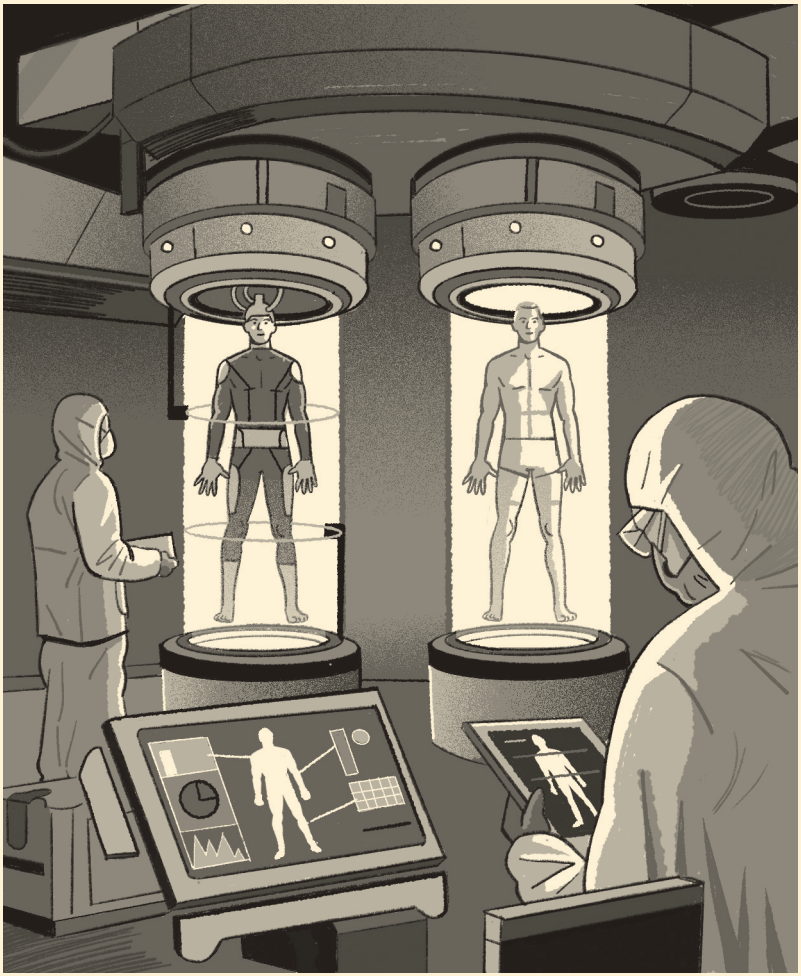
How?

First, your face and body are scanned. Every dimension, detail and colour are recorded so they can be duplicated in bio-plastic. Then nanobots – microscopic robots – are injected into your brainstem. They clone your memories and copy your personality. After that, the New You Foundation upload them to this artificial Pleeka body.

Pleekas never get sick. Never get tired. Never age. They survive injuries that would kill someone made of flesh and blood.

Pleekas don't need food or drink or exercise any more. But you can buy apps that give them thirst and hunger, and download special digital "eat-drinks" that satisfy those needs.

Pleekas don't need to sleep. All those hours in bed are a thing of the past, and so are trips to the toilet. No more flushing away your waste so



many times a day. No more wiping your bum! And Pleeka skin is anti-bacterial and doesn't sweat, meaning no more showering. All that water saved!

But human urges and emotions don't go away. Pleekas can still fancy people. If they fancy the Pleeka back, they can still do something about it. If they don't, the Pleeka can just switch off the heartache. As the Pleeka slogans say: *It's the full human experience but with none of the boring bits!*

*

The first Pleekas were made for old, sick, rich people who wanted strong, young bodies again. Their minds were put inside New You artificial bodies to be preserved for always. A bit like pickled onions in a jar of vinegar.

That was the idea anyway.

But there were problems with those early Pleekas. A lot of the artificial bodies broke down or went haywire. But people still took the risk cos they were going to die anyway. And as each new problem was solved, the next generation of Pleekas became safer and more reliable.

It made me think about my mum.

She died when I was just a little kid. She was a journalist like Dad. The two of them were covering the Great Water War of 2064, and Mum

was drowned in the final assault on the Panama Canal. The northern locks were blown up, and she was swept away into the Caribbean Sea.

If she'd been a Pleeka, she would've survived. Pleekas don't breathe, so they can't drown.

Mum would have come back to us.

But it would never have happened. Mum was one of the millions who had protested *against* Pleekas. "Robots cosplaying as humans," she called them. Mum said they made a mockery of the human experience. "Just because you *can* do something, it doesn't mean you *should*. Who would turn their hopes, dreams and secrets into data?"

The answer was: lots of people.

Not just the old folk. There were people who'd been badly injured in accidents or who had terminal illnesses. And others who just found real life dull compared to "going digital".

Pop inside a Pleeka! the adverts told them. *Get the life you're owed!*

Of course, the people who became Pleekas soon owed the New You Foundation a shedload of cash cos they had to pay for their Pleeka batteries

to be replaced every year. Mum was right not to like them back then.

Today, things are different. Pleeka batteries only need changing every eighty years.

The New You Foundation says that Pleekas can go on for ever.