

FUTURE SCAPES

LIFE IN 2025

by Marcus Sedgwick



SONY
make.believe

www.sony.co.uk/futurescapes

WELCOME TO

FUTURE SCAPES



WHAT DO YOU THINK LIFE WILL BE LIKE IN 2025?

FutureScapes is an exciting collaboration project that aims to explore the potential of technology and entertainment to create a better, more enjoyable world in 2025. It's not about predicting the future so much as imagining the possibilities. There is by definition an infinite number of possible futures ahead of us. But one thing is clear: the world of 2025 will be very different from the one we live in today.

By starting with life in 2025, rather than today, FutureScapes aims to stimulate more creative thinking about how technology might help us live sustainably. By sharing immersive and entertaining stimulus material – such as short stories – this collaboration aims to invite the contributions of 'futures' experts and an eclectic mix of thinkers, writers, designers and the public to address the opportunities and challenges of life in 2025 and the potential roles technology will play in it.

FutureScapes is designed to be as open and collaborative as possible and is being convened by leading sustainability non-profit organisation, Forum for the Future, and leading consumer technology company, Sony.

To find out more or to get involved visit www.sony.co.uk/futurescapes or follow us on Twitter @better_futures and #futurescapes.

LIFE IN 2025

by Marcus Sedgwick



Marcus Sedgwick used to work in children's publishing and before that he was a bookseller. He now happily writes full-time. His books have been short listed for many awards, including The Guardian Children's Fiction Award, the Blue Peter Book Award, the Carnegie Medal and the Edgar Allan Poe Award. Marcus lives in Cambridge and has a teenage daughter, Alice.

The shuttle train is quiet. Full of people, but quiet. They sit, heads bowed, unaware of each other, unaware of the view sliding by, the view of the green, spreading fields that become the dense suburbs that become the dazzling skyscrapers of the city itself.

Suzuki Susumu rides the train back from the airport, into the centre. He's heading home. Between his feet he has placed his one small bag, protectively, because in his bag is something he believes will change the world. He is the only one who doesn't bow his head.

He looks at the changing view, he observes the colours of the leaves, the texture of the concrete, the light of reflections on rain-dampened streets. He looks at the other passengers. He knows what they are doing; their heads bowed as if in contemplation, and maybe they are. Each contemplates their life, wondering how to make it better, how to get more fulfilment, more joy, more of everything. Only the lives they are contemplating are not their real ones, but the lives of dreamSpace.

Susumu knows what they are doing; gazing at their phone, toying with the dreamSpace app, preparing the world they will re-enter upon sleep. He knows exactly what they're doing, because he designed the app. Of course, he didn't design the original technology. That began in 2012 when researchers managed to record still images direct from the optic nerve. It wasn't long before they found they could record something merely being visualised by the subject. Next they found they could record moving images of whatever a subject chose to imagine. These early recordings were strange affairs, as the researchers experimented with different techniques, and as the subject learned how to control the visualisations. The film, taken from sensors located on the skull was peculiar stuff, twisted and floating, shifting and merging images, surreal as a dream. And it might have been that which made someone wonder, as the technology improved, whether it would be possible to capture dreams themselves.

In the fall of 2017, the first recording of a dream was made, and with the subject's consent, posted on the internet for the whole world to view. The dream itself was nothing special; a sequence of images from the subject, a woman named Yukiko, who had dreamed of her childhood home, and her mother, long since dead. Once it was posted, the reaction was enormous, and further developments swiftly followed when another research group got in touch with the optical team. This group had been working on aural recording techniques, and a mere six months later a new dream was posted on the net, this one with a full, though bizarre, sound track to the dream of a man called Tadashi, who flew from a rooftop, laughing.

Within another twelve months the first commercially available dream recorder was on the market. Soon the clumsy sensors taped to the skull disappeared, to be replaced by

a tiny and harmless sensor implanted just under the skin at the base of the skull. A five-minute operation was all it took to enable anyone to have potentially permanent access to the whole electrical, and emotional, life of their brain. These devices were expensive to begin with, but the price tumbled as, in truth, there was nothing very extraordinary about the technology. The following winter saw a tipping point, as demand for the dream recorders rocketed.

In the way that often happens, sudden leaps in technology piled in upon themselves, and the turning point was when the pioneering research team revealed that far from being a one-way process in which the dream recorder taped the thoughts of the brain, they could equally use the recordings to stimulate the brain, thus enabling a dreamer to continue a dream they'd had the night before. Or the week before, or, theoretically, to stimulate a dream about anything at all.

Some doubted the accuracy of these early experiments, but the key insight hinged on the fact that the memory of a dream is identical to the memory of a real event. There is no biochemical or physiological difference between them. They are the same.

It began as a gimmick. A trick. A small piece of entertainment and escapism, and yet within eighteen months, everyone in the western world was controlling their dream world, and the vast majority of them used the same app to do it, an app called dreamSpace, written by Suzuki Susumu of the hurriedly founded dreamCorp.

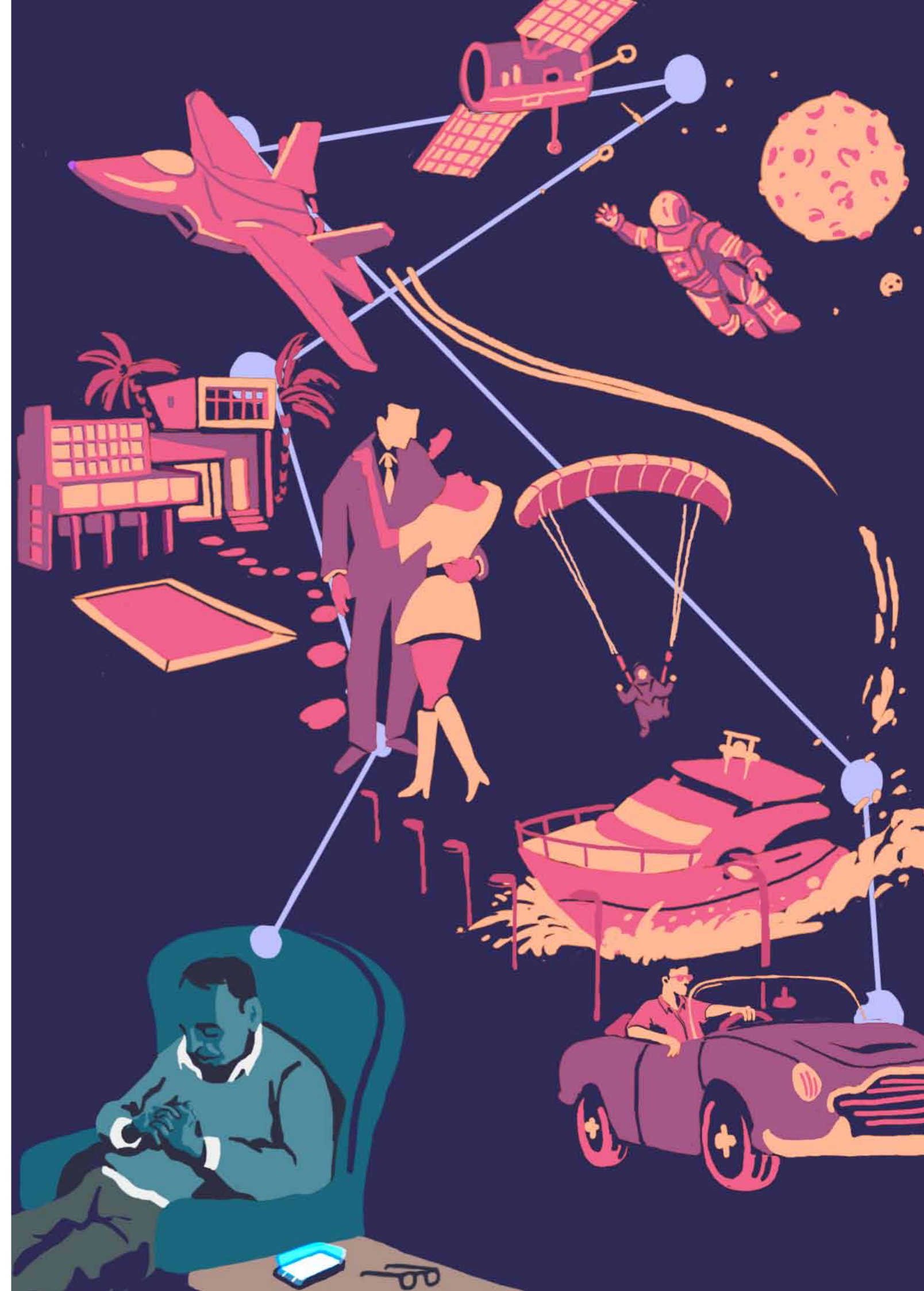
It seemed there was a fortune to be made, one that would make those of social networking sites look like coins in a jar on the kitchen shelf.

By the time the thing that had begun as a gimmick started to worry governments, it was too late to legislate. A few commentators took notice when more people were using the dreamSpace app than the largest social network, but despite all the dreaming going on, no one dreamed what was going to happen. Besides, those politicians liked to control their dreams as much as anyone else. In the dreamSpace, you could be anyone. You could do anything, be with anyone, and you could make-believe a completely happy life, far from reality, with all its woes and worries.

The real world brought daily news of climatic disaster, of religious war, of petrol shortage, of water shortage, of land shortage. Of all the global disasters that had been spoken about all those years ago at Kyoto and Durban and Reykjavik, the greatest problem was the one no one had dared to mention: population explosion. The demands of nine billion people had simply become too great for one planet, and the result was famine, disease, and war.

But that was a world that only applied to seven billion people. For the two billion in the developed world, there was dreamSpace. Get through your day at work, eat some food, get to bed early. With additional apps to encourage longer sleep patterns and in particular REM sleep, it became more and more attractive to live in dreamSpace, where life was, for want of a better word, perfect.

It wasn't long before many people started to spend more than twelve hours in dreamSpace, and at that point, as night became another day, who could say which was the more important of their two lives, which was the more real?





Whole families opted to link into a dream network, to live a new life together. Others stayed solo, guarding their fantasy life jealously. Don't like your job? Get a new one, as an immortal fighter pilot, or a supermodel, a football player. Unhappy with your wife? Dream of a new, younger one, with longer legs and smoother skin.

Don't like yourself? Re-imagine you, just as you would like to be. Taller, fitter, better looking, a more skilful lover, successful, liked by everyone, sought out, admired, desired. Quite simply, better.

For years, people had made themselves think they felt happier by worshipping celebrities. All those magazines, TV programmes, talent shows. All selling the promise of happiness. And now? Wasn't it better not to idolise those few individuals, but to become them? Susumu thinks of the old couple who live in the apartment across the hall from him. He knows, because Takeo has confided in him, that he now has a different spouse. Younger, sexier, fitter, with fewer grey hairs and more love for him. Kazuko has confided no such thing. But Susumu has seen how her eyes twinkle when she thinks she's not being watched. By day they rub along, at night, they each dream a thousand new fantasies, spending their waking hours in a kind of daze, wondering what new joys to give themselves. And so, in effect, they spend their whole lives, not just their sleeping hours, dreaming.

Susumu reaches his stop and nurses his bag through the doors and into a taxi, as if it's a new-born child. Maybe it is. Around him crowds of people silently walking, their minds somewhere else, their fingertips programming their phones even as they go. The taxi drifts through the city to the district where he lives.

He doesn't blame people for retreating to dreamSpace. If anything, he blames himself for writing the app, but he knows that someone else would have done it if he hadn't. And he'd been as big a user as anyone. For three years he'd lived in an entirely different world. He'd become an astronaut, strangely, and had travelled faster than light to distant galaxies, where he had communed with bodiless creatures who spoke to him in a silent language of poetic beauty. He drifted with them in their mind world across aeons of black space, learning the dark secrets of the universe, marvelling at how little he understood. For Susumu's great mind, that felt like a pleasure, a secret and guilty joy; to know nothing. He'd dreamed of the stars, and yet, in the end, something had pulled him back to earth, with a bang.

He doesn't know why. His working life had changed. His real working life. He'd been promoted several times, and his reputation had grown on the back of the dreamSpace app. One day his boss had called him in.

"We have great reach," said Yoshio. "But we speak to only a fraction of the world. The developed world. I want to reach the other seven billion, Susumu-san. I want you to travel. I want you to travel and see how we can spread dreamSpace to the rest of the world. It is a world of poverty, but some will emerge with a little money. If we can take even a fraction of that market we will achieve wealth. And control. I will give you a year to travel everywhere, and then use that excellent brain of yours to report to me how we will proceed." And so, he'd travelled, throughout the developing world.

He'd been to South America, to Africa, to Asia, and somewhere along the way, his mind had been opened. He'd seen what the rest of the world was struggling with, and he knew that he'd got it wrong. He had been using technology in the wrong way.

Here, in the Sudan, he'd seen water-recycling technologies, powered by photo-voltaics, controlled by cheap yet effective processors. There, in India, he'd seen stronger strains of crops producing previously unthought of yields. And everywhere, were nanotechnologies, so that processing was happening at a microscopic level, doing a hundred different jobs to make the lives of the poorest better. Purifying dirty water, engineering drought resistant crops, making smart materials for buildings that could withstand an earthquake, and even rebuild themselves at a molecular level if damaged. He saw simple field medical stations that could diagnose and treat disease, saving the eyesight, or the limbs, or the lives of millions. He'd seen nano-medicines that could enhance drug-delivery systems, even prevent the transmission of HIV. He'd seen lives saved, health rebuilt, food brought to the starving, even sight brought to the blind, with virtual-eye technologies. He remembers watching a young blind man take his first steps with an audio-describer relaying minutely detailed information about the world around him, transforming the quality of his life. He remembers hearing the man laughing.

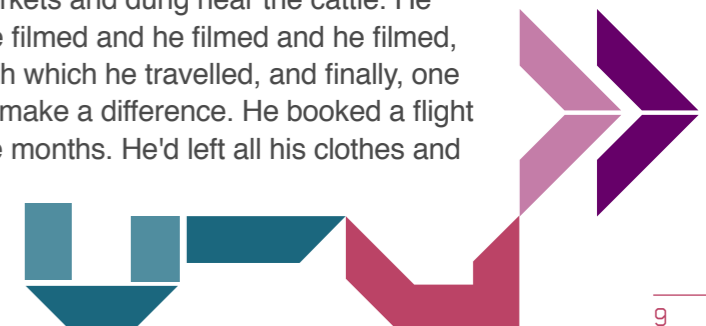
That, he thought, is what we should be doing. What I should be doing. Using technology to make people's lives better, but their real lives, not their dream ones. With the population of the world exploding across its face, it had become vital, he knew, that every resource was precious, that things should be done most efficiently, that unusable land should be saved, that water should be efficiently desalinated. And nanotechnologies were the way to do it.

So, somewhere along the journey that year, he'd taken out his phone, and deleted the app, his app, the dreamSpace app, so that his dreams would no longer be under his control.

That first night, somewhere in Africa he recalled, he'd had a dream of such startling strangeness. There had been a certain pain and some wonder, and he'd woken, sweating and panting in the middle of the night. It had been years since he'd woken in the night, thanks to the control that dreamSpace offered.

It was unfamiliar, and for a while he sat awake, staring into the blackness, listening to the sounds of the dark. When he finally slept again, he slept long, and woke late. When he did, he saw what dreamSpace had done to everyone, and how it had turned lively and engaging people into little more than fleshy robots, doing all the mundane things that they had to do before they could scurry off into the virtual lives of dreamSpace once more.

The following day, Susumu walked holding his phone out in front of him, and began to film. He saw the colours of the landscape, the colour of the sky. He saw wrinkles on faces, and ants in the dust. He smelt fruit in the markets and dung near the cattle. He heard laughter and chatter and shouts of anger. He filmed and he filmed and he filmed, recording everyday life in the poor countries through which he travelled, and finally, one day, he recorded something that he thought would make a difference. He booked a flight home, though he wasn't due back for another three months. He'd left all his clothes and





belongings, bar the small bag with enough for the journey, and his phone. He caught a bus to the town, a train to the city, then to his plane, to another plane, to the shuttle train, to this taxi, and now, he steps out at the foot of his block, still cradling his bag.

He gazes up at his apartment, on the twentieth floor. It feels like a lifetime since he's been there. He steps into the lift and thumbs the button. As he steps out into his corridor, old Takeo and Kazuko are there.

He hasn't seen them for nine months, but they neither smile nor acknowledge him. They do not look at each other either, just stare blankly.

He reaches his door, apartment 25, floor 20. The print-reader lets him in; it at least has not forgotten him, and slipping off his shoes, he places the bag on the low table in the living room.

There is no time to waste. Night is coming on. People are returning from work. He slips his phone from the bag, and wanders through to the homestation, where he syncs it. Once it's done, he transfers and copies the film files to his server, copying it twice, saving it in different places. Of course, he knows what he is about to do is risky but he has no choice.

He designed the dreamSpace app, and he co-designed the entire system upon which it runs. Not everyone in the world uses their system, but around ninety percent do. And, sometime ago, it was decided to write in a facility whereby users could, optionally of course, receive selected content from dreamSpace, rather than dreams of their own creation. A revenue stream was devised whereby, in return for a small remuneration, users would watch a small amount of advertising in their dream, along with their own creations.

And though the system was entirely opt-in, Susumu himself wrote the code that allowed any user's privacy and other settings to be overwritten from dreamCorp's control. Or, indeed, from Susumu's workstation in apartment 2025.

He knows they will find out what he has done, and very quickly. He will lose his job, at best. At worst he might be imprisoned for tampering with company technology.

He takes one last look out of the window, sighs. He helped cause this waking sleep, and now, using the same technology, he's going to do something to fix it. He turns from the window, and gets to work. It doesn't take that long to prepare, and that is just as well, it's getting late. Within a few minutes he has everything ready, and all he has to do is to press a single key. He closes his eyes, and presses it.

And that night, every single dreamSpace user has the same dream. Rather than the dream they have programmed, their dream is stimulated by a piece of film that Susumu took in Ethiopia, that he has now disseminated to nearly two billion people. It's a short and simple dream.

In it, a small girl in a poor African village is playing with a deflated football. It's way too big for her, and she has trouble kicking it far, but nevertheless, she keeps at it, thumping it as best she can against a nearby wall. Her clothes are dirty and torn, she is clearly at the very limit of human existence.

She runs at the ball once more, and trips, falls, landing on her face. She looks surprised for a moment, then tears come to her eyes, and she begins to cry. A boy comes out from a low mud house. He's a little bigger than she is, and is probably her brother. He walks over to her, and picks her up, setting her on her feet. He tickles her and her tears are replaced by laughter.

The girl says something, and the boy laughs too. He nods, and runs over to the football, rolls it gently to her, so she can try, again, and again, to kick it further, and a little more strongly. They play together for hours.

That's it. That's all it is. But Susumu's excellent brain saw what the dream meant, what it would mean to people, what it represented.

That they are not alive in dreamSpace. That, in a perfect world, one that is utterly perfect, people cease to own themselves. They cease to be what it is to be human, to have to have at least some effort to exert, some struggle to face, and that only in this way can they be happy.

When the night is over, Susumu, who has not slept a wink from fear at what he has done, goes out into the small grass square in front of his block. He's there for a while, alone, and then he sees people drifting into the morning sunlight.

There's a quiet cough at his shoulder. He turns to see old Takeo and Kazuko from apartment 2024.

"Susumu-san. When did you get back?"

He smiles.

Takeo goes on.

"We had a strange dream last night. We both did."

Susumu sees that the old man is holding his wife's hand.

They are smiling.

"A beautiful morning, Susumu-san."

Susumu agrees.

Yes, he will lose his job. And he may go to prison.

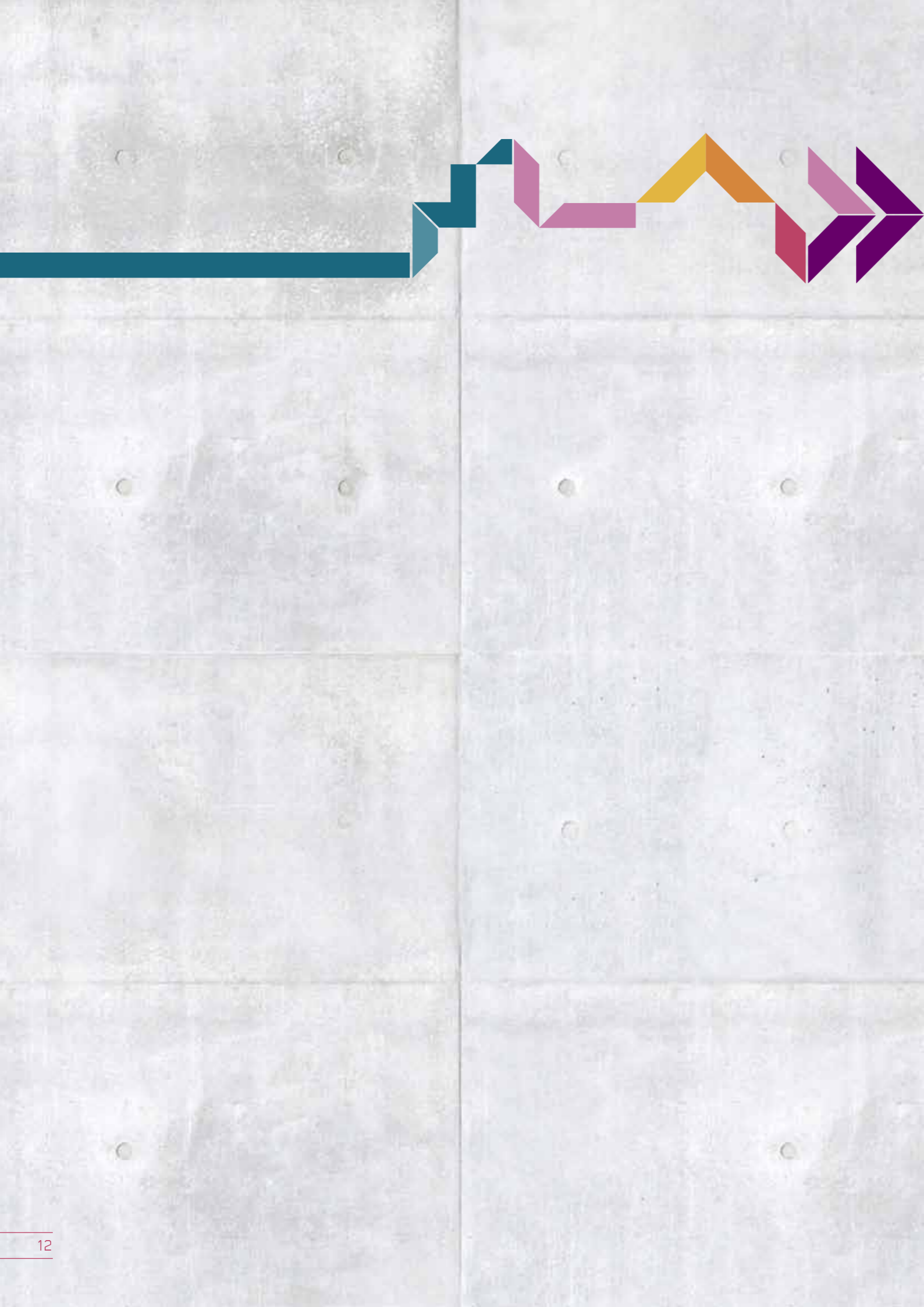
But after that, well...

There are all those nanoproducts in the developing world
They will need good programmers to write code for them.

"Yes, Takeo-san, he says, A beautiful morning."

He smiles.





About Sony

Sony is a leading global innovator of audio, video, communications and information technology products for both the consumer and professional markets. Offering a complete end-to-end HD value chain and with its electronics, music, pictures, game and online businesses, Sony is one of the world's leading digital entertainment brands, employing approximately 170,000 people worldwide.

Sony recognise that our businesses have a direct and indirect impact on the societies in which we operate and we see sustainability as a critical part of our company ethos and activities. Our partnerships with NGOs such as WWF, UNICEF and Save the Children ensure we play our part as a responsible global company. Our "Road to Zero" global environmental plan sets out a long-term goal of achieving a zero environmental footprint (through curbing climate change, resource conservation, control of chemical substances and biodiversity) throughout the life cycle of our products and business activities by 2050, as well as specific mid-term targets in line with that goal.

Sony believes that technology can make a positive contribution to tackling social and environmental issues, both today and in 2025. We have a strong track record in open innovation for sustainability with our Forest Guard and Open Planet Ideas initiatives.

Sony's role in FutureScapes is to use our brand's reach and our expertise in technology, imagination and innovation to engage the widest possible audience in an open collaboration to help everyone better understand – and innovate for – an uncertain future.

To find out more about our corporate sustainability activities, visit: www.sony.co.uk/eco

About Forum for the Future

Forum for the Future is a non-profit organisation working globally with business and government to create a sustainable future. We have 15 years experience inspiring new thinking, building creative partnerships and developing practical innovations to change our world. Our aim is to transform the critical systems that we all depend on, such as food, energy and finance, to make them fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Forum works with more than 100 partners across business and the public sector. We specialise in a 'system innovation' approach to sustainability and use powerful tools such as 'futures', innovation and sustainable business model development to help companies succeed. We communicate and share our thinking and tools widely, including running a Masters course for future leaders and publishing the leading magazine on environmental solutions and sustainable futures, Green Futures.

Forum for the Future's role in FutureScapes is to design and deliver the futures process and provide sustainability expertise.

www.forumforthefuture.org

Illustrations by Scriberia



SONY
make.believe

www.sony.co.uk/futurescapes