

## ChYous Your Future

Harvey opened his videomail app and sighed. He looked at the subject lines.

"It was a fun three years, but sometimes I wish life was easier now."

"Now you've done it!"

"Great! I was expecting to be retired."

Harvey had just decided to switch his university application from medicine to music. His parents, who were quite anxious, mainstream people, had been giving him a hard time for passing up on a higher-paying, secure career in favour of something that was less of a sure thing. And now, he was getting angry messages from himself.

It was no good just deleting them. Then you got another angrier message saying that you were ignoring your future, and eventually his parents would be on his case for wasting their money by not using the system. They'd paid for the full ChYous package with interactive multiple life-stage avatars. Whenever Harvey wanted, or more often whenever Harvey's parents wanted, he could have conversations with AI-generated versions of his future self, and find out what now-Harvey's choices had just done to the future Harveys.

Harvey opened the first message. His own face looked back at him, only ten years older. He pressed play.

"Hi. So, you went for it. Mum and dad were pretty annoyed, right?"

"Yes. Mum said I was wasting a good brain. Dad said I'd thrown away the chance to earn a packet and I'd end up as a music teacher if I was lucky."

"Well, I sort of am a music teacher. Not in a school. Local kids come round and I teach them piano. Which is driving mum and dad insane. There are only so many times in one day anyone should hear the first eight bars of "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?"

"Wait, so I'm still living with mum and dad? I'm not in a rock star pad? I'm not even sharing a flat with the rest of the band?"

"The band broke up when I moved away. I found a better band at uni of course – we did some good gigs at the student union, I wrote some songs. We got close to getting signed by a label once. But we never quite made it. We still do weddings and parties. But it's not regular money. I did have a great time at uni though – and I still love music."

Well, at least he was only broke, not bored. Harvey clicked on the message from 65-year-old him. He wasn't looking forward to this. Last time he'd spoken to Old Him - there were older versions of himself, but talking to them weirded him out - he'd been enjoying a cruise, paid for from his doctor's pension. He'd be furious at the change.

"Morning!" his older, greyer self said back. But he was beaming.

"Morning," said 18-year old Harvey, tentatively. "So... how are you?"

"Surprisingly good. Of course, there have been times when I've wished I was a consultant somethingorotherist, driving a flashy car and everyone thinking my job's important. But actually, I think I've enjoyed this life more."

"How's that?"

"Well, the music obviously. But also the kids. I can't imagine retiring. Teaching keeps me young - well, at least teaching one or two kids at a time does."

"Try telling that to 40-year-old me. He sounds pretty cross."

The periodic warning message faded in at the bottom of the screen:

*"All statements made by ChYous avatars are projections based on your present circumstances, available data and probabilities. For an alternative projection please reset."*

Harvey reset the avatars. It felt a bit like cheating. Lots of the results were similar to the first one. Some were worse, some were better. In one simulation, he did get to be a pop star, but he didn't like himself very much - he seemed very impressed with himself and didn't realise how many future Harveys who were just as good musicians hadn't got a lucky break.

He ran the simulation mode too, altering the data so it was based on the choice he hadn't made. Some of the doctor versions of him were very happy. A few were mostly stressed with the responsibility. One Future Harvey had done a reset of his own, ditching his medical career in his thirties to start a business creating rock songs at children's parties.

He wondered what Past Harvey would have thought of Present Harvey. If he'd had ChYous back when he was ten, and he'd met an avatar like the eighteen-year old he was now, would he have wanted to be him? Would he have tried harder to be who he ended up being? It was like seeing yourself in a hall of mirrors.

Harvey closed the laptop. He went downstairs to practice some scales.