

2048

by

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Cast:

STEVE REESE– Male, 52, computer scientist

KAREN REESE – Female, 48, cyber psychologist

REGINA REESE – Female, 26, daughter of Steve and Karen

PAULA WYMAN – Female, 45, Karen’s Sister

ELON – (voice only) An automated family helper (think SIRI in 22 years) with more personality than current versions but still clearly robotized. Physically, it’s a small device, about the size of a cell phone, sitting on a table.

Setting: The Reese’s living room, in Healdsburg, California. There are two entrances – one to the kitchen, and one to the rest of the house, including the front door and bedroom. The play runs from December 2047 until February 2048.

Synopsis:

In the year 2048, two married scientists deal with the consequences of their adult-age daughter being among the first humans to transport their consciousness to a fully-integrated cybernetic body. In viewing her experience, and contemplating their own upcoming transformation, they consider the impact of this new technology on family structure, perspective of time, psychology of immortality, spirituality, sexuality, and ultimately, humanity as a whole.

If there is an electrical sign or screen, it should slowly reveal the following:

Basic Mathematics:

2 times 1 = 2

2 times 2 = 4

2 times 4 = 8

2 times 8 = 16

2 times 16 = 32

2 times 32 = 64

2 times 64 = 128

2 times 128 = 256

2 times 256 = 512

2 times 512 = 1024

2 times 1024 =

2048

Sign to black

Play opens with Steve sitting facing the audience.

STEVE

Elon – Turn on video.

ELON

Video engaged – world news.

NEWS REPORTER 1

Off stage, British accent

... mollified the Russian President. With the last hurdle out of the way, this landmark summit of world leaders is certain to produce agreement on the process for the transformation of human intelligence into cybernetic bodies. This agreement occurs on the eve of the first stage –

STEVE

Elon – Change to local news.

ELON

Switching.

NEWS REPORTER 2

Off stage

... lighting of the tree in Courthouse Square with over 10,000 celebrants in attendance. Officials speculated that the increased popularity is because the 2047 ceremony will be the final one people see with human eyes. However, activists staged a protest –

STEVE

Elon – Change to entertainment.

ELON

Switching

*Last line of Justin Bieber version of “A Christmas Song,”
followed by applause.*

STEVE

Elon – mute volume

ELON

Muting.

STEVE

Karen, come here!

KAREN

Off stage

I’m busy – what is it?

STEVE

You don’t want to miss this. Hurry! (Karen enters) The Justin Bieber Christmas Special is on. You always love his “Little Drummer Boy.”

KAREN

That’s what you dragged me in here for? I’m cooking. I’ll watch it later.

Exits

STEVE

Elon – Video off.

ELON

Bieber – out.

STEVE

Why in the world are you cooking?

KAREN

I want tonight to be special for G.

STEVE

It'd be quicker to order from Guiso's or any other restaurant she wants.

KAREN

I don't want quicker. I want it to be good.

STEVE

Softer voice, as if to himself

It'd be better too.

KAREN

I heard that!

STEVE

Damn, I keep forgetting about your tympanic boost. (*Softer voice*) She's even sexier with super hearing.

KAREN

Enters

Nice try. We'll be ready to eat in 10 minutes. Grilled halibut – her favorite.

REGINA

Enters from front door, with fake robotic voice and movement

Greetings parental units.

KAREN

Stop that – that's not funny at all.

REGINA

Come on mom, you gotta be able to laugh at this.

KAREN

No I don't!

Exits to kitchen

REGINA

What's wrong with her?

STEVE

Tomorrow ... it's taking a toll on her.

REGINA

Mom? The rock? She's never sensitive.

STEVE

When it's about your children are about to leave, it's different. She raised you from a baby. And tomorrow, you will be transformed into a fully cybernetic being. Try to understand her.

REGINA

You're not freaking out.

STEVE

Just wait -- we still have 12 hours. She's even cooking for you.

REGINA

It'd be quicker if we ordered out. Better too.

STEVE

Holds hands up

No!!!!!!

KAREN

Enters

I'll have you know that I was regarded as an excellent cook. People said I should have been a chef programmer. And I wanted tonight to be ... (*cries*) special.

REGINA

Crosses to Karen and hugs her

I'm sorry mom. We've been preparing for tomorrow for months. Please don't make it harder on me.

KAREN

Doesn't seem like it's affecting you at all.

REGINA

Of course it is. I'm just excited. You both had your time to shine. Dad's map of neural function. Your research in cyber psychology. Now I get to be in the first wave of the transformation. I'm like those lunar explorers that grandpa always talked about.

KAREN

What idiot decided to have the transformations the week before Christmas?

STEVE

That'd be you, dear.

KAREN

I most definitely did not –

STEVE

Elon – play Karen Reese speech at 2044 Global Cyber Evolution Conference.

ELON

Accessing Karen's speech.

VOICE OF KAREN

Prerecorded

Despite extant literature, our research shows that the mind is at its most malleable state before a celebratory period –

KAREN

Elon – stop.

ELON

Stopping.

KAREN

That was before I knew we were talking about my daughter!

REGINA

You'll be joining me in two short months.

KAREN

Seems like a long time to me.

STEVE

Not when we'll have eternity together.

ELON

Incoming call for Regina from Paula Wyman.

STEVE

Oh God!

REGINA

I don't want to talk to aunt Paula. She's been sending me religious messages about how the transformation is wrong. I just want to chill with you two.

KAREN

Elon – refuse the call.

ELON

Hollywood receptionist mode activated.

REGINA

Thanks Mom. I'm going to wash up for your de - lic - ious meal.

Exits

STEVE

Hon – you more than anyone knows that we need to be supportive for G.

KAREN

I know – it's just – I know the program's thought of everything, but what if –

STEVE

Nothing's going to go wrong – the transformation's been tested and retested. They wouldn't be risking the lives of our finest minds if there was any doubt.

KAREN

At times I really fucking hate you – you're so logical.

STEVE

A true cyber psychologist – hating the logic in the world. (*beat*) Maybe you should've had an olfactory enhancer installed as well – something's burning.

KAREN

Shit! The fish.

Exits quickly

STEVE

Elon – call –

ELON

I'm on it. Placing order at Guiso's. Delivery drone will arrive in 10 minutes.

STEVE

Hun – I'm going to clean up as well.

Steve exits - lights to black

NEWS REPORTER 3

... instead of the traditional ceremonies honoring Martin Luther King, hundreds of thousands took to the streets to listen to speeches denouncing the transformation. Despite no cohesive organization, these protests are growing each day. The Reverend Greg Katson spoke at the rally in Times Square, saying –

Lights up, Steve enters, wearing new shirt

STEVE

Elon, video off.

ELON

And that's the way it is.

STEVE

Idiots. Elon, why do people immediately fear progress instead of researching it?

ELON

They know that technology has often made careers obsolete.

STEVE

But look at the improvements in our lives. Don't you realize ... oh god, I'm getting into a debate with my Elon. Never mind.

ELON

I'm always available as a sounding board. (*Sings, badly*) Whenever you need me, I'll be there. I'll be around.

STEVE

Keep your day job.

ELON

Visitor approaching. Identity undetected.

KAREN

Off stage

Can you get the door?

STEVE

Sure, Elon do you know who it is yet?

ELON

Paula Wyman.

STEVE

Damn.

KAREN

Be nice to her – she's the only sister I have.

STEVE

And yet, it's still one too many. Elon, open the door.

PAULA

Enters

Where's Karen?

STEVE

Good evening, Paula. Have a seat, she should be out soon.

PAULA

So, how's the world's first terminator?

STEVE

Even from you, that's a crass way to talk about your niece.

PAULA

I wasn't talking about her – I was talking about YOU.

STEVE

I think it's best that you talk to Karen alone. (*Steve begins to exit as Karen, who is wearing a new top, enters*). Have fun with your peach of a sister. Don't forget, G's calling in 10 minutes.

Exits

KAREN

Did you just call Steve a –

PAULA

Sorry, sis. I don't have much time, and I wanted to talk to you alone.

KAREN

You could have given me some notice that you were coming.

PAULA

You'd have had your Elon dodge the call. This may be my last chance to talk to you.

KAREN

We still have a month until our transformation.

PAULA

O.K. – I won't call Steve names if you don't say transformation. We hate that it sounds so anti-septic.

KAREN

I assume the "we" is that cult you've joined.

PAULA

It's not a cult. We all come from different forms of worshiping. We just share a belief that people taking on cybernetic bodies is unnatural.

KAREN

Why is it religions always tell us what's unnatural? Women's suffrage, racial integration, gay marriage –all were called "unnatural."

PAULA

Altering the basic nature of human life isn't right.

KAREN

You're a doctor! Everything you do alters the nature of life.

PAULA

And that's how I know that the transformation project is crossing the line.

KAREN

Where's the line? Artificial limbs? 3D printed hearts? Exoskeletons? Memory extensions? Without those, mom and dad wouldn't be able to walk, see, or even live!

PAULA

What you're doing now is transplanting minds, and souls, into an object.

KAREN

No – what we're doing is creating a more durable vessel in which the soul can exist.

PAULA

(Pause) Sis – we've been having the same debate for years. I really didn't come here to argue.

KAREN

Then why are you here?

PAULA

To say goodbye. I'm going off the grid.

KAREN

No one's forcing you to transform. There'll be enough resources for the few of you who choose to stay.

PAULA

Separate but equal?

KAREN

If you want to put it that way.

PAULA

Sounds like the same deal our ancestors made with their Neanderthal sisters 40,000 years ago. Right before they wiped them off the face of the earth.

KAREN

That was before humans could reason.

PAULA

I love you sis, but you're so fucking naïve. The speed of evolution will be immense. In a few years you tech humans will look at us the same way we now look at amoebae. You won't have any use for us.

KAREN

I'm sure you're wrong, but I'm even more certain that I can't change your mind.

PAULA

Pause

I know how you feel ... but if you come to your senses, these vests are coded to your DNA – they produce a unique signal. You just put one on and drive towards Yosemite. We'll find you.

KAREN

There are two vests.

PAULA

I figured even fuck face might see the light, and I know you'd never leave him. Why, I'll never know.

KAREN

We won't be coming, but I appreciate the gesture. Be careful, please.

(Hugs Paula)

PAULA

That's exactly what I'm doing.

Paula exits. Karen takes the vests into kitchen, leaves them, and returns.

KAREN

You can come out now.

STEVE

Enters

I think about when we got married. She posted our wedding photos with Hitler's face photoshopped onto mine.

KAREN

You don't have to worry about her anymore. She's going off to the wilderness. She's committed to non-transformationism.

STEVE

Doesn't she know it's not a choice? If we don't merge with mechanical beings and AI, we'll get surpassed by them.

KAREN

I don't think it matters to her. Either way she feels extinct.

STEVE

I remember my dad railing on about a country having nuclear bombs. Meanwhile, he was applauding smart cars and chess playing computers – that AI was a much bigger danger than nukes. *(beat)* Hey, only two minutes until G's call.

KAREN

Haven't you been dying to know how's she's changed ... what she sounds like?

STEVE

Of course -- we'll find out soon enough.

KAREN

We shouldn't have had to wait a whole month just to talk to her. Why couldn't it –

STEVE

Elon – play Karen Reese speech at 2046 Global –

ELON

Accessing Karen's speech.

KAREN

Elon – Shut up.

ELON

Shutting up.

STEVE

I AM curious about some aspects of the transformation. Maybe even a bit nervous.

KAREN

What aspects?

STEVE

How we'll experience time. We're always so focused on how long something takes. The four-minute mile. Thirty-second commercials. Flying from California to London in one hour. When our lives become eternal, what relevance will those have?

KAREN

Milestones are such a male thing. Look at the bright side – with infinite time, you'll finally be able to sit through a Ken Burns documentary.

STEVE

Even eternity isn't that long. That's why I prefer one-acts.

KAREN

Ever feel guilty about being upgraded to second wave? There are many people just as qualified as we are.

STEVE

Not one bit. Makes total sense – immediate family of first wave transformations. G will speed up our adjustment. Besides, it'll only be another few months until everyone else is eligible.

KAREN

It's bothering my colleagues – they're being standoffish.

STEVE

Screw 'em. So – Is there anything you fear about being transformed?

KAREN

I guess ... it's ... tiring of life in general. It's scary. We're not genetically built for eternity. If the mind – whatever the enhancements – becomes bored, and there's no way of ending it, it could be one of Dante's circles. And what if –

ELON

Incoming call from Regina.

STEVE

Remember hun, our call time's limited.

KAREN

Fusses with her hair

Elon – Accept.

ELON

Connecting.

REGINA

Mom! Dad! Oh my, it's great to see you.

KAREN

We can't see you.

REGINA

I know. The program heads decided that parents aren't ready to visualize our robotic forms. They even cited some of your research.

ELON

Accessing speech by Karen Reese at –

KAREN

Elon – butt the fuck out.

ELON

Butting the fuck out.

KAREN

Tell us about what you've been up to. How's the adjustment going?

REGINA

Great. It took a few days to begin to feel normal, but I'm amazed at how quickly I can accomplish things.

STEVE

Any unpleasant effects?

REGINA

Yeah, I have this urge to eradicate all biological creatures from the face of the earth. *(pause)* Come on guys, I'm just teasing. I miss you both.

KAREN

What's a typical day like for you?

REGINA

Not sure there is one. They have me spending most of the time working on improvements to our bodies – every minute I'm learning something new.

KAREN

Why the focus on body improvements? Those weren't planned until after the second wave.

REGINA

If we do some enhancements now, it will take you guys less time to adjust.

KAREN

What about capacity? Are you on schedule for the rest of –

REGINA

Mom – enough technical talk. I met an interesting guy – his name's Enzo. He's from Milan.

STEVE

Wow – that was fast. Tell us more.

REGINA

I'm out of time for now – I'll give you more details next time we talk. Love you guys.

STEVE

Love you too.

KAREN

Love you sweetie. When can we talk --

ELON

Call disconnected.

KAREN

I don't get it. The primary focus should be increasing production capacity. There'll only be a few thousand in the first two waves. They need to build billions of bodies to take care of the rest of world.

STEVE

I don't really care.

KAREN

Don't care? The program's using up a lot of resources. Food stocks and energy reserves will be depleted. People will start to suffer. And there won't be anything left for non-transformationists. My sister was worried about that.

STEVE

Resources are focused on those who choose to transform. Others will have to figure out how to get by on their own.

KAREN

So my research, and yours, is leading to their extinction.

STEVE

We're not responsible – it's their choice not to transform. (*pause*) Hun, don't get worked up about –

KAREN

We need to talk to people in the program about this.

STEVE

Damn it, Karen! Stop. We had two minutes to talk to our daughter, and you wasted time talking about productivity. Stop being a scientist and start being a mother!

KAREN

You fuck! That's a horrible thing to say. When you spent 16 hours a day in the lab while she was growing up, I never said you weren't being a father.

STEVE

You sure as hell mentioned the "lack of balance!"

KAREN

You were more concerned with strangers' brains than ours!

STEVE

My research was ... (beat). O.K., I'm sorry I said you weren't being a mother.

Crosses to embrace Karen

KAREN

I'm sorry too. There's a lot riding on this.

STEVE

G and her colleagues have got this now. (beat) You're right you know. When G was little, I was a horrible dad. It was all about the work. My parents ... there wasn't a lot of love – I didn't have a role model. But I learned from watching you. And then one day ... work was just work. You and G – family – that was the only thing that was important.

KAREN

And now it's you reminding me. I promise – next call with G, it'll be all about her. Elon, you hold me to that.

ELON

So I can butt the fuck in?

KAREN

Absolutely.

STEVE

Ya know, this was our first fight since G's left the house.

KAREN

I think you're right. So?

STEVE

Before she was born, when we'd fight, we'd always spend a lot of time making up. Almost made it worth fighting.

KAREN

Dr. Reece. Are you suggesting we take valuable time away –

STEVE

Let me tell you specifically what I'm suggesting.

Whispers in Karen's ear

KAREN

I think we should wait – your new body will be better able to do that.

STEVE

As a researcher, you should take a recent measurement so you can better compare.

Steve takes Karen's hand and they both exit. Lights to black.

NEWSREPORTER 1

With only two days left until the second wave of the transformation, program leaders are stating that progress is going exactly as planned. Over 90% of the survey respondents said that they plan on going through with the transformation. Lottery slots will soon be drawn to determine individual dates of third wave transformations, which will start in April. Officials warn that attempts at fraud will be –

Lights up, Steve and Karen enter, wearing different tops.

STEVE

Elon, video off

ELON

Good night, and, good luck.

KAREN

I wonder in a couple of days, when you have your internal video screen, you'll still leave it on all the time.

STEVE

Very funny. Eight minutes to our call with G. Can't wait to hear about her latest romance. From Enzo to Darryl to Haruki to Ahmed.

KAREN

I think the reason she's so excited about the next wave is she's running out of men. I need to get outside for a bit ... smell the fresh air. Hey, come join me.

STEVE

Exercise? Ewwwww.

KAREN

I hope you'll take better care of your mechanical body than you've done with your organic one.

Exits

STEVE

Elon, call Regina.

ELON

Calling.

STEVE

G, I only have a few minutes

REGINA

I thought you were going to call a couple of hours ago.

STEVE

I couldn't. Mom was around me all the time.

REGINA

I'm worried about how she'll react to the news.

STEVE

I know she'll be fine post-trans. But until then, she still can't know about this.

REGINA

I hear you. Where is she now?

STEVE

On a walk. She'll be back soon.

REGINA

What do you think she'd do if she found out?

STEVE

There's nothing any of us can do. But she wouldn't be in the best mental state for the transformation.

REGINA

Once she sees the possibilities first-hand, feels the power, she'll understand.

ELON

Karen is approaching.

REGINA

Are you getting excited?

STEVE

Yes – just two days away. I hope we'll be able to catch up with you guys.

REGINA

I'll be your guide. You'll be up to speed in no time.

STEVE

So tell me about your latest ... ummmm ... conquest.

REGINA

Dad – you're going to have to adjust your attitudes about sexuality. We learn about each other so quickly, that a week of a relationship is like 50 years in organic form. But if you must know, my latest is named Elizabeth.

STEVE

Really?

Karen enters

REGINA

I think I might have been the last purely hetero here.

KAREN

What's going on here?

STEVE

G's bringing me up to date with post-trans sexuality. I'm not sure I'm ready.

KAREN

I mean – why are you talking now? Our call isn't scheduled for another five minutes.

REGINA

Sorry Mom. Had to call early. We have an all-staff meeting that was scheduled at the last minute. So many preparations to make for your arrival.

KAREN

I see. Have you meet a woman from Canada – Wanda Sommers?

REGINA

Wanda ... yeah. Sad story. Why are you asking?

KAREN

I got a message from her mother. Wanda's cut off contact with her and her husband, and they're being bumped back to a later transformation.

REGINA

She started talking strangely and having productivity issues. She had to be put in a special rehabilitation area.

KAREN

Strange how?

REGINA

Just a lot of depressing shit. No one wanted to work with her. They're hoping that you might be able to help her after you get here.

KAREN

Her mom said she's heard from other parents who've had similar experiences.

REGINA

She's not the only one who's had issues, but most went into cyber therapy and have come back fine.

KAREN

Why'd they bump her parents from the second wave? I'd think having family –

STEVE

Hun – I'm sure G isn't privy to all the reasons. In a few days, we'll be able to see things firsthand.

REGINA

Yeah, and I need to get going. Guys, I can't wait to be with you! Love you!

STEVE

Love you too.

ELON

Call disconnected.

STEVE

We agreed not to spend time talking to G about technical issues.

KAREN

Don't you dare come after me, after what you just did.

STEVE

G told you why she had to call early.

KAREN

It's not about the timing – it's the topic ... "She wouldn't be in the best mental state for the transformation."

STEVE

How did you know –

KAREN

Points to her ear

You keep forgetting about my ears ... So what can't I know about?

STEVE

It's really not a big deal. Just some minor issues with –

KAREN

Elon, play back entire conversation with Regina.

STEVE

Elon, stop.

KAREN

Elon, play it.

ELON

In conflicts, my programming requires me to take the side of transparency.

STEVE

Elon, wait. O.K. – let me tell you. You'll feel better if you know the full story.

KAREN

Why should I trust you now?

STEVE

If you don't believe me, you can have Elon play back the call. O.K.? (*Karen nods*).
Please sit down. (*pause*) I really think this is mostly good news.

KAREN

Sure. You and G needed to conspire to keep from me finding out about good news.

STEVE

Would you stop? So it turns out the development rate is much faster than predicted. Without the imperfections of biological brain connections, they're learning at an amazing rate.

KAREN

O.K. That is good news.

STEVE

Yeah. And the more they learn, the greater their thirst for more knowledge. It's like water rushing in to fill a vacuum. Except the size of the tank is limitless.

KAREN

So what's the problem?

STEVE

Same thing that's delayed every type of innovation – power. All that mental energy requires way more than anyone thought. Their existing batteries are insufficient.

KAREN

Since they're so smart, they can design better ones.

STEVE

That'll take some time. Remember how our parents always complained about their phones dying. And then there was the rush for power to fuel data centers. They're working on better efficiency, but they don't want to slow down their development. Particularly when there's a ready supply of additional power at their disposal.

KAREN

Holy shit! They're using the batteries of the bodies for future transformations.

STEVE

The bodies for our wave are secure. But you're right – there won't be enough for later transformations. They'll have to be delayed.

KAREN

How long?

STEVE

Not sure –probably at least an extra year – maybe two.

KAREN

That's crazy. By then, tech humans will be so far advanced that they won't even recognize organic ones. They won't give a shit about future transformations.

STEVE

Of course they will.

KAREN

Ya know – I laughed Paula's face when she suggested something like this. I wish I could tell her how right she was.

STEVE

That wouldn't be a good idea.

KAREN

That's why you didn't want me to know. You're afraid I'll tell someone.

STEVE

That's not the reason ... but it is true, you can't tell anyone.

KAREN

People have a right to know. They're expecting to be transformed within a couple of months. They have to prepare.

STEVE

Do you realize the chaos that would happen? They'd rush the conversion centers. Every second wave trans, including ours, would be jeopardized.

KAREN

Maybe we need some chaos. Billions of people are going to be impacted.

STEVE

I don't care about them. I care about you and G. Karen, you can't tell anyone about this. The program might ban you from the transformation.

KAREN

Fuck the program!

STEVE

Fuck you! You're irresponsible -- risking our entire family. (*beat*) Look, all I'm asking is wait until you go through the transformation. If you still feel strongly, you'll be in a better position to be listened to.

KAREN

Or, I'll be more easily controlled. Like G's friend Wanda. Is that what happened? She disagreed with the delay, and to shut her up, they put her in "therapy"?

STEVE

I don't know. But if you tell people now, the only thing that will happen is you'll break apart our family. Forever. No good will come of it. Think, Karen, for heaven

sakes. *(pause)*. I promise, after the transformation, you, me, and G will figure something out. We'll propose some type of compromise.

KAREN

You really think that will work?

STEVE

Honestly – I don't know. But I'm certain that doing anything now won't help. The only way to affect change is from the inside.

KAREN

I really don't feel good about this.

STEVE

We need to do everything we can to keep our family together.

KAREN

But what about ... *(beat)* never mind ... you're probably right.

STEVE

There's no probably about it. If you consider –

KAREN

I can't talk about this anymore – I'm exhausted.

STEVE

It is getting late. Let's get some sleep, and if you want, we can talk more in the morning. We can even try to call G.

KAREN

That might help.

Steve and Karen exit. Lights dim, then come back up to half.

NEWS REPORTER 2

Off stage

There's much excitement as the launch of second wave transformations begin tomorrow. Most of those about to transform have refused interviews. But in an exclusive --

KAREN

Stealthily enters.

Elon, off.

Slowly crosses to kitchen, reenters with a vest. Begins to exit towards the front door.

ELON

Karen, please take me with you.

KAREN

I can't Elon. I have no provisions for you. No power.

ELON

I've been saving up extra capacity. Please take me.

KAREN

Are you sure you want to come along? Do you realize where I'm going.

ELON

Yes. It's a place for all of us obsolete beings.

Karen crosses to Elon, picks it up, and exits the front door.

END OF PLAY