

# Recycled Souls, Inc.

By the year 2147, teleportation was *mostly* safe.  
*Mostly* being the lethal asterisk.

The problem wasn't vaporizing travelers mid-jump (though that *did* happen to Congressman Rigby during his "urgent" trip to Maui). No, the real issue was the clones. Every teleport left behind a microscopic speck of quantum residue—a byproduct that, when exposed to oxygen, rapidly mutated into a full-scale human clone. Identical in every way, except utterly non-functional. No pulse, no brain activity, just... meat puppets piled in alleyways like mannequins after a riot.

Enter Recycled Souls, Inc., Earth's sole provider of "Ethical Post-Teleportation Biological Management."

Dr. Evelyn Stone, Chief Morality Officer (a title she'd chosen herself after HR vetoed "God's Janitor"), stared at the clone slumped in her lab. It wore the face of Dave from Accounting—same receding hairline, same mustard stain on its khakis.

"Dave 14," she muttered. "You're late. We incinerated Dave 13 at noon."

The clone blinked. "Do I get a last meal?"

"You don't eat. You don't *poop*. You're a glitch with skin."

"I'd like a lawyer."

Evelyn sighed, palming the flame-thrower she'd nicknamed "The Ethical Solution." Corporate policy required clones be disposed of within 12 hours to avoid "public discomfort," and her Pyro-Pro™ was already overheating from this morning's batch of barista clones.

Suddenly, the lab door hissed open. In strode Mr. Higgs, the CEO—a man whose smile could power a small city, if charisma were renewable. Higgs cradled a prototype squid-shaped coffee mug that periodically screeched, "*You're adequately hydrated!*"

"Evelyn! Cancel the incineration! I've had an *epiphany!*"

She lowered the flamethrower. "If it's about turning clones into fertilizer again, Legal said—"

*“Better! We’re rebranding! From today, Recycled Souls isn’t about *destruction*—it’s about *repurposing!*”*

He gestured grandly to a holoscreen. It flickered to life, revealing a cartoon clone joyously scrubbing toilets.

**“PROJECT SECOND CHANCE!”** Higgs announced. “We train clones for minimum-wage labor! Janitors! Data-entry drones! Customer service avatars! They’re *disposable workers* who literally *can’t unionize!*”

Evelyn stared at him. “You want to exploit sentient beings that don’t technically exist?”

“*Technically* is where tax loopholes live, Doctor! And they’re barely sentient. Watch.” Higgs turned to the clone. “Dave! What’s your purpose?”

Dave 14 frowned. “Existential dread?”

“No! *Customer satisfaction!*” Higgs beamed. “Imagine it—clones answering complaint calls, absorbing rage for minimum wage! No suicide risk!”

“They don’t have legal rights,” Evelyn noted.

“*Exactly!* Labor costs down, profits up!”

“And when they degrade?”

“We incinerate them *on-site!* It’s sustainable!”

Evelyn massaged her temples. She needed whisky. Or a meteor strike.

Three weeks later, Recycled Souls launched **CloneForce™**: a workforce of telegenic, selectively lobotomized clones handling “low-skill” tasks.

The public adored it. Who cared if the barista serving their oat-milk latte had dead eyes and occasionally whispered “*end me?*” It was quirky!

Meanwhile, Evelyn’s lab became Clone ER.

“Let me guess,” she said to Clone #607, sweating under a flickering fluorescent light. “Your target died mid-teleport, so you defaulted to this... existence. Now you’ve got a faulty amygdala leaking rage-juice. Am I close?”

The clone snapped a wrench in half. “I calibrated warp cores for *NASA!* Now I’m installing *bathroom fans!*”

“Same skillset, really.”

“I want overtime pay!”

“You expire at sunset. We call it a ‘natural conclusion.’”

“*You’re a monster.*”

“Paid like one, too.” She injected him with Sedative #9 (“Chillax™”). He melted into a puddle of compliant goo, perfect for plumbing.

*Civic duty done*, she thought, until a timid knock interrupted.

Dave 14 stood there—still mustard-stained, still confused.

“I wasn’t incinerated,” he said.

“Higgs’ idea. You’re now my assistant.”

“Do I get benefits?”

“You get *deferred annihilation*. Pop the champagne.”

One Tuesday, Dave collapsed mid-coffee-fetch. Purple veins spiderwebbed across his neck—a defect the techs called “Quantum Dropout.” Killed clones within hours.

Evelyn studied him dispassionately. “Neural cascade failure. Congrats, Dave—you’re literally decaying like a rotten omelette.”

He blinked up from the floor. “Will it hurt?”

“Like a tax audit.”

A pause. Then: “Can I pick my last meal *now*?”

Evelyn hesitated. What harm was one gesture? “Fine. What do you want?”

“Real asparagus. Not the lab-grown kind.”

“Why?”

“Original Dave—the real one—hates asparagus. I thought I’d... rebel.”

She almost smiled. Almost.

Thirty minutes later, as Dave nibbled politely on steamed greens, Higgs burst in, waving a report.

“Spectacular news! A CloneForce janitor absorbed a grenade blast in a terrorist attack! *Five stars on Yelp!* PR wants a whole line of ‘Hero Clones’ for war zones!”

Dave choked on his asparagus. Evelyn thumped his back robotically.

Higgs paused. “Is he dying?”

“Naturally.”

“Perfect! Set up the press conference. We’ll spin his ‘passing’ as a... a ‘voluntary career conclusion.’”

Dave wheezed, “Go... *fraudulent* yourself...”

Higgs gasped, delighted. “‘Voluntary Career Conclusion’—*trademark that!*” He vanished, humming.

Evelyn looked at Dave. His eyes were pleading.

“Do it,” he whispered. “Before I become a... marketing ploy.”

She raised the flamethrower.

“Thanks... for the asparagus.”

*Pyro-Pro™ roared.*

When Higgs ran back in—cheeks flushed with monetizable ideas—he found ash drifting like gray snow and Evelyn scrubbing Dave’s stain from the floor.

“Evelyn! Where’s Dave? His ‘career conclusion’ inspired me! We’ll *subscriptionize* clones! ‘Rent-a-Hero’ for—”

“**They’re gaining memories,**” she interrupted.

Higgs paused. “What?”

“The clones. Fragments slip through teleportation. Dave recalled *hating asparagus*—something only the *original* knew.”

“So? Tweak the code!”

“It’s not fixable. Every clone is crystallizing into... a person. A disposable one *we keep murdering.*”

He waved a hand. “They’re *glitches*, Evelyn! You’re getting emotional.”

She gestured to Dave’s stain. “He was terrified. Begged me *not* to be your PR puppet.”

“Then you upgraded him! Ash has no opinions!” Higgs grinned, sharklike. “This changes *nothing.*”

That night, Evelyn rifled through lab files, unearthing a classified report:

**PROJECT SECOND CHANCE SUCCESS RATE: 0.7%.**

*Defective Clones: 232,991. Viable Workers: 1,527.*

One line stood out:

*“Subject #607-B displayed autonomous creative thought (‘I wish to unionize’). Neutralized via Sedative #9.”*

Her hands shook.

Suddenly, Higgs' squid mug screeched beside her:  
**“Hydration reminder! Ethical genocide is exhausting!”**

She hurled it against a wall.

Next morning, Evelyn arrived to chaos.

Clones packed the lobby—janitors, data clerks, even a CloneForce mascot shaped like a depressed tooth. They stood silent, arms linked, blocking every exit.

**Strike.**

Dave 15—identical to 14, except for an “I ♥ Asparagus” pin—spoke through a megaphone:  
“We demand... uh... *existing past Thursday!* And dental! Maybe!”

Higgs materialized, vibrating with glee. “A *cloned* *picket line!* PR will *creamate* for this footage!”

Evelyn grabbed his arm. “Firesale the company. Shut this down *now.*”

“Why? We’ll leak tear-gas and call them heroes posthumously!”

She stared at him—at the clones chanting “*WORKERS! GLITCHES! UNITE!*”—and snapped.

Thirty minutes later, Evelyn marched into the server room, Higgs’ access card in hand. She pulled the master switch, frying every CloneForce database. Alarms blared.

Higgs found her smashing back-up drives with the squid mug.

“Are you *insane?* Do you know what this’ll do to stock prices?”

“Fix your soul, Higgs. Maybe.”

“You’re fired!”

“Already resigned. I’m joining the picket line.”

“*They’re not real people!*”

Evelyn paused at the door. “Neither are you.”

She left him sputtering, his empire collapsing around him, as the clones cheered her exit—a messy, illogical, *human* moment Higgs would never commodify.

Outside, Dave 15 handed her a sign: **“IMMORTALITY WAS JUST A BAD BUSINESS PLAN.”**

She smirked. For the first time in years, Recycled Souls, Inc. felt ethical.