

*"We don't make the news – we simply make it easier to swallow. "*

News Now! Corporation is on the verge of a breakthrough – a pill that takes you inside any news story, right as it happens and right while you sleep. It's an efficient system: Take one of these and by morning you're not just refreshed, you're informed.

Peter Scharber, architect and designer, is part of the team testing News Now!'s new pills; he and colleague Donaldson West provide the feedback the company needs to prepare a product that carries information to the masses. The real star here is Sammy, a meticulously designed psychedelic news anchor. If the events of the day are too graphic, too tragic – or too boring, for that matter – she serves as a comforting dream companion.

Ryan Pitts  
Senior editor  
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Celebrated at cultural conventions and always available via streetside kiosk, everyone knows Sammy, and that kind of touchstone is priceless in a society that takes diversity so seriously. Because really, culture isn't what it used to be since the great wars ended and genetic reconstruction remixed the world. Now amphibious monkeys and komodo dragons take tea and commute to work alongside human beings (and the occasional tree frog), private sidewalks lead to relocated vintage homes, and mailmen sell pre-war packages to the people (and pterodactyls) who live there.

It's a society propped up on pillars of absurdity. Telephones are banned to protect people from invasive communication, but office buildings rise with transparent Steelglas that lets colleagues from the floor below see just what you're up to. Giant jellyfish with titanium teeth teach Zen English classes to children, while their parents travel in trundcars between domed cities under the sea.

But soon everyone will dream the news with Sammy, and she'll help people (and river rats, and gnomes) experience all of life – in a homogenized distribution of truth that shouldn't disrupt everyday convenience. That kind of science offers world-shaping power, and Peter begins to spot signs that News Now! isn't as benevolent as their PR people might tell you.

Journalists and culture critics aren't much use in this society. They're hunted down, their atoms reclaimed and rearranged into something useful, like drinking water. Remaining newsgatherers practice their craft underground from basement networks, publishing their stories onto capsules that plug into computers, televisions and old-time radios. And onto newsprint, of course, perhaps even the broadsheet size if you're daring and don't mind dirty looks from the other commuters.

And that's where you read the kind of truth you just won't get from a dream.