



SCRIBE

NOVEMBER  
2021

**DEAR READER,**

**AT THE START OF NOVEMBER, SCRIBE'S MEMBERS FELT DRAWN TO THE THEMES OF GRATITUDE, WARMTH AND COOLNESS. OUR CONTRIBUTORS SHED A LIGHT UPON WHAT MEANS THE MOST TO THEM, AS WELL AS THE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN BOTH THE WARM AND COOL MOMENTS OF LIFE. THEY REMIND US THAT WHEN PROMPTED, WRITERS HAVE THE POWER TO TAKE A SIMPLE PHRASE AND TURN IT INTO ART.**

**WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR OUR CONTRIBUTORS' DEDICATION TO OUR NOVEMBER 2021 ISSUE, AND WE HOPE YOU ENJOY THEIR STORIES.**

**SINCERELY,  
MIA CARRANZA  
VICE PRESIDENT AND POETRY EDITOR**



**PRESIDENT:  
DANIEL WRONSKI**

**VICE PRESIDENT:  
MIA CARRANZA**

**TREASURER:  
JOSEPHINE VACCARO**

**EVENTS COORDINATOR:  
MOITRAYEE DASGUPTA**

**SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR:  
ELIAM JUNG**

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:  
RIDA AHMED**

**EDITORS:  
ABDALLAH AHMED  
ANISA PERSAUD  
ANGEL SHAJI  
ERIN FOO  
MIA GINDIS  
SOFIA ROTHERMEL  
TZIPPI APPLEBAUM**

**C  
O**

**N**

**T**

**E**

**11\_PROLOGUE: KEYHOLE OBSERVATION**

**N**

**T**

**S**

**5\_HAPPY THANKSGIVING!**

**7\_GRATEFUL FOR ALL PARTS OF ME**

**8\_THE CHESS SET**

**10\_BEFORE I DIE**

**14\_HAPPY TOGETHER**



# HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

## BY ROSALYNN YE



“Have a happy Thanksgiving!” Joe chirped as he handed yet another one of my brown feathered friends to the humans.

Around this time of the year, humans crowd the farm. These humans come to take us away from Joe - the nice man who brings us food everyday.

“You think it’ll be our turn this year?” my friend Feast asked.  
“You think it’ll be our turn this year?” my friend Feast asked.

I shrugged my wings and just kept eating the grass. To be honest, I didn’t really care. As long as I get my food, I’ll be happy. Just as I lowered my beak in for another bite, I felt a pair of strong arms lift me from the ground.

“Wait, I wasn’t done eating!” I cried, but of course Joe could not understand me. As Joe carried me away, I saw Feast stepping towards my food. “Traitor,” I muttered.

“Here you go! Have a happy Thanksgiving!” Joe exclaimed as he handed me over to a tall, fair-skinned lady with long brown wavy hair that fell down to her waist. She wore a bright red blouse and blue jeans. Her jade green eyes flicked over me. Smiling warmly, she replied, “Thank you. This turkey’s beautiful.” She turned around and began to walk away from Joe. I watched

as Joe, the farm, and all the other turkeys grew smaller and smaller.

We arrive at a burgundy red pickup truck. A tanned-skin guy with curly chestnut brown hair and chocolate brown eyes leaned against the truck. He wore a white polo and blue jeans. When he caught sight of us, he opened the door to the passenger seat. He waited for us to get in, before walking around back to the driver’s seat. As the truck started moving, the lady said to the guy, “Amelia will be delighted to see a real live turkey!” He chuckled in response. While the guy drove, the lady held me in her lap and stroked my back gently. I stared out the window, watching us pass by a never ending field of delicious grass. It was like a whole new world.

It wasn’t long before we came to a stop in front of a big, white house. Loud shouting shattered the quiet, peaceful atmosphere.

“Where’s the turkey? I wanna see the turkey!”

A girl with chestnut brown ringlets and chocolate brown eyes came bouncing out of the house. She wore a puffy sleeved white dress and a flowered hat. Laughing, the mother handed me over to the grinning girl.

“Here, take care of the turkey okay?” Your father and I are going to pick



up food for tonight's dinner," the mother said to Amelia.

"What am I supposed to do with Mr. Turkey?" asked Amelia.

"You can dress the turkey if you'd like. Now, your dad and I have to get going now, otherwise we'll be back late. We'll see you later." She kissed the girl's forehead and headed back to the car.

"Did you hear that? Mom said I could dress you up!" Amelia told me. She brought me into the house and set me down on the floor. "Wait here," she said, before rushing up the stairs.

As soon as she was out of sight, I began to wander around the room in search of food.

"Hey, didn't I tell you to wait here!" Amelia scolded. She dragged me back to where she had originally placed me. She proceeded to pick up a red ribbon and tied it around my neck.

"You look so cute!" Amelia gushed. She continued searching through the pile of accessories she brought down.

"I hate it" was my response. I shook my head, trying to get the ribbon off me. Who does this human think she is? Dressing me up as if I were one of the dolls Joe's daughters kept back at the farm. "Look at this dress! Mr. Turkey would look great in this!" Amelia cheerfully told herself. Oh hell no. I took one glance at the pink, frilly dress, and then made a run for it.

"Oh crap, I forgot to close the door!" I heard the girl exclaim from behind. I run out the door, down the steps, and through the yard. Sucker. Suddenly, I bump into something hard. I look up and see a row of tall white fences. Of course they would have something to keep turkeys from escaping, just as the farm did.

"GET BACK HERE!" Amelia screamed. I quickly moved out of her grasp, and began running again. Why won't this girl just let me enjoy some food in peace?

"Amelia, what are you doing?" a voice said.

The lady and man were back. They came in through the gate carrying paper brown bags.

The mom came over and scooped me up. "Come on, you must be hungry now. Let's get you some food," she said to me, while stroking my head. She brought me back to the house and placed a plate of berries in front of me. I was ecstatic to finally get some food.

"Honey, it's time to dress the turkey!" I heard the lady shout. Not again.

"Didn't you ask Amelia to dress the turkey?" the father asked, as he brought the rest of the groceries in.

"Yes, but...I think she misunderstood," the mother answered.

The father looked over at me and laughed. "Let's get these garments off you." I was relieved to finally get the ribbon off. I knew I should probably run before they put on another accessory, but the sweet taste of the berries made it hard to pull away.

Salt and pepper? What's that? Finally, I looked up. I let out a huge squawk. Gleaming in the mother's hand was a giant, silver, metal blade.

"Happy Thanksgiving" the mother said to me.



In a world full of photoshop and  
unrealistic expectations,  
People are often led to having  
low self-esteem and confidence.

Why doesn't my body  
look like that model's?

Why can't I be skinny like her?

Why can't I have abs like him?

Why can't I be as tall as them?

I wish my lips were fuller, hair was straighter,  
lashes were longer.

Why do we focus on all our so-called  
imperfections"?  
What about everything that makes us  
who we are?  
Every skin color, eye shape,  
hair type, and height,  
And our bodies,  
no matter what shape or size,

*We each have our own combination  
that makes us unique.*

*So why  
do we take our bodies for granted  
and constantly look down upon them?*

*Why not take a moment and  
be grateful for what  
you may have been given?*

**grateful for  
all parts  
of me**

**by**

**Valentina Schembri**

I'm grateful for my feet,  
to let me stand tall and proud  
for what I believe in.  
Grateful for my legs, giving me the ability to  
walk and run wherever I please.  
Grateful for my arms, which let me hug those  
near and dear to me.  
Grateful for my hands, which let me  
write stories to my wildest dreams.  
Grateful for my lungs, which provide me  
oxygen to breathe and live.  
Grateful for my heart, to let me feel  
the happiness and sorrows of life.

GRATEFUL FOR MY LIPS, SO THAT I CAN  
KISS THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE I LOVE.  
GRATEFUL FOR MY NOSE, SO THAT I CAN  
SMELL THE SWEET COOKIES MY MOM BAKES.  
GRATEFUL FOR MY EARS, SO THAT I CAN  
LISTEN TO MUSIC THAT MAKES ME FEEL EUPHORIC.  
GRATEFUL FOR MY EYES, TO BE THE  
WITNESS OF JOYOUS MEMORIES AND SMILING FACES.  
AND EVEN DOWN TO THE SMALLEST CELL IN MY BODY,  
I AM GRATEFUL FOR ITS FUNCTIONS THAT GIVE ME  
THE ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE THIS GIFT CALLED LIFE.  
SO—WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL FOR?

# The Chess Set

Every day after school, I walked four blocks out of my way to 3 Lily Drive. The other guys would be out on the field, but I would come here to the old house every day. The house was an old brown color and you could see some of the wood chipping away. There were two neat rows of flowers that led to the front door and an old chime that hurt your ears when you walked past it. One brick on the steps was loose and would always crack and creak as I stepped on it.

I opened the chipped blue door and the usual musty smell greeted me as I entered. The living room was to my left and I found the old man in his usual spot on the couch, sleeping with the TV on. He was always watching the news. After turning the TV off, I took his old chess set from its place on the shelf and set it up on the kitchen table. I made sure to bang every chess piece when I put them down, but he never woke up when I did that. I walked back to the living room and shook his shoulder gently. He didn't move. I shook it again roughly. He still didn't wake up.

I shouted in his ear "granddad!"

Slowly, he opened his eyes, the wrinkles on his face moving. Even though he was old, he had these piercing blue eyes that seemed to look right into you. They made me uncomfortable, so I looked away whenever he spoke to me.

"Ray," he said, "you're here, you should've woken me."

"Yeah," I said.

I helped him stand up and handed him his cane. He walked towards the table sitting down in the chair by the window and I sat down opposite him. We did this every day- I would come over after school, wake him up, and play chess with him. It was his favorite game. He kept the same old set that he had since he was 25, I think- he must have been 25 when he got it since the set was so old. The board was worn and the pieces were chipped. I told him more times than I can remember that he needed a new one, but he would just smile and say it brought back memories. I would always nod when he said that, but really it sounded pretty strange to me. I had been playing chess with him for the last few months ever since we moved to this town. Dad said the old man was getting on in years and we should be there for him. Dad said it was good for him to have some company so he would send me over every day. Today's game was like every other game we played. He would move the chipped white pieces and I would move the chipped black ones. While we were playing, he would always talk and talk, giving me advice.

"Be sure to study..."

"Make friends..."

"Discover your interests..."

His voice was soft and I would nod as he talked, but I had heard what he said a thousand times, so I had learned to tune it out. Today, he told me about a job he had once had as a painter. I didn't care and I didn't want to, his stories were all the same, but today seemed worse than ever. Every time I glanced at the clock, the time seemed to be the same.

Finally, after an hour, the game ended as his knight captured my king. His knight always captured my king and I always lost.

The old man smiled kindly "next time maybe," he said.

"Yeah," I answered.

After that, he would usually eat dinner. I put the old chess set back on the shelf and took out the trash.

"Thank you Ray, I will see you tomorrow," he called as I headed out.

"Yeah," I said, closing the front door.

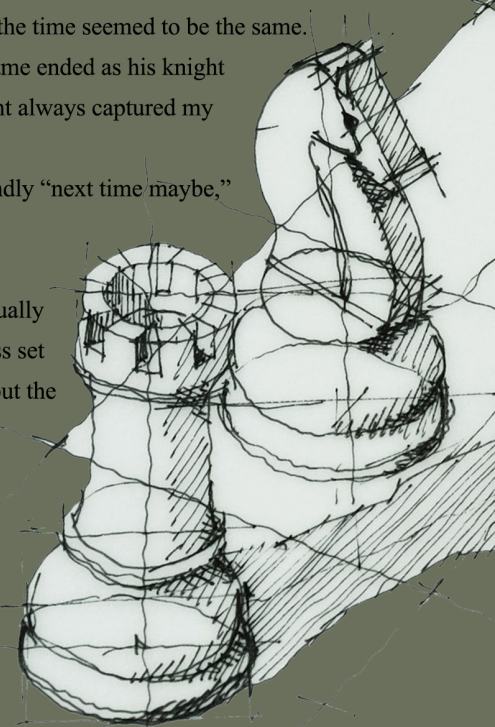
The loose brick creaked as I walked out.

The next day was the same. And the next day and the next.

Every day we played the same game and I lost. And every day I would step on that loose old brick.

But one day, as I entered the old musty house, that loose old brick fell out when I stepped on it. The chimes didn't chime as I walked past them and when I opened the door, something was different. Dad was in the house but granddad was not. I could see the chipped chess set on the shelf waiting to be taken down and played, but there was no one there to use it. Dad talked to me for a few minutes and as we walked out of the house, I saw the old brick lying on the ground.

I didn't go back to 3 Lily Drive after that day. Instead, I would walk straight home. But one strange winter day when the sun was shining and it





# By Tzipora Applebaum

wasn't too cold, I found myself in front of the chipped blue door. The brick was in the same spot on the ground and the same musty smell met me when I walked in. It was dark and cold in the house, but I could see the chess set on the shelf. I took it down; it was cold and dusty. Brushing it off, I set up the pieces on the kitchen table one by one. Then, I sat down and moved the white pieces and then the black ones, my hands shaking the

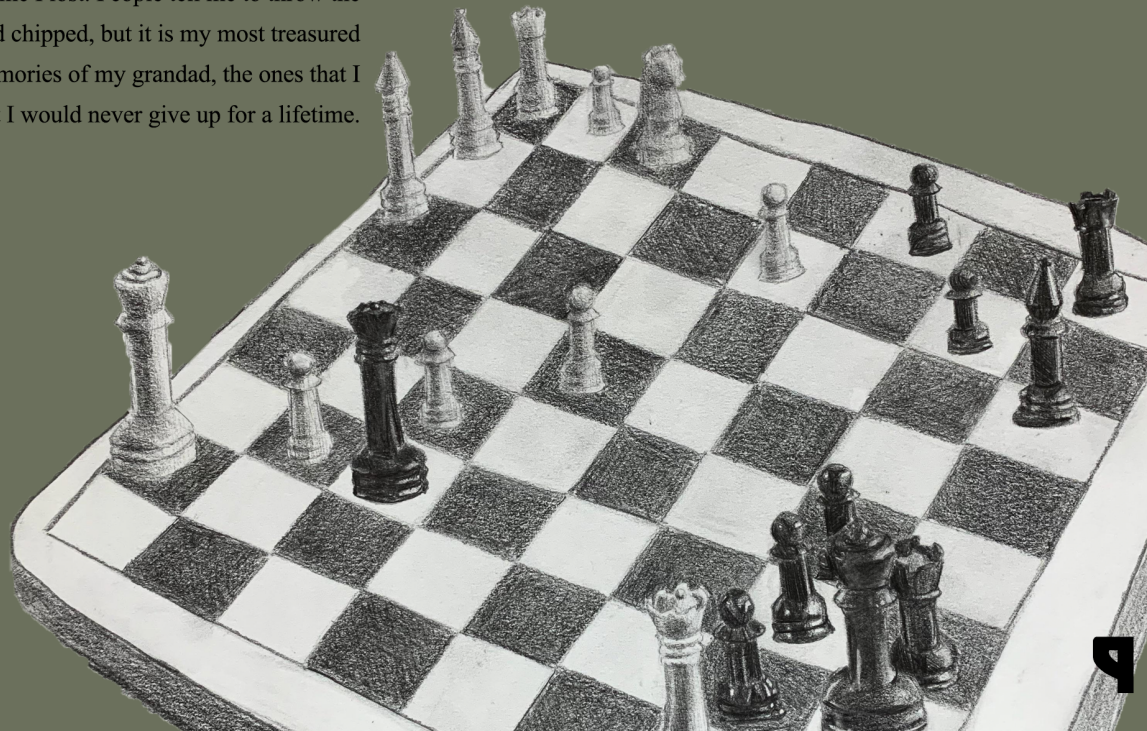
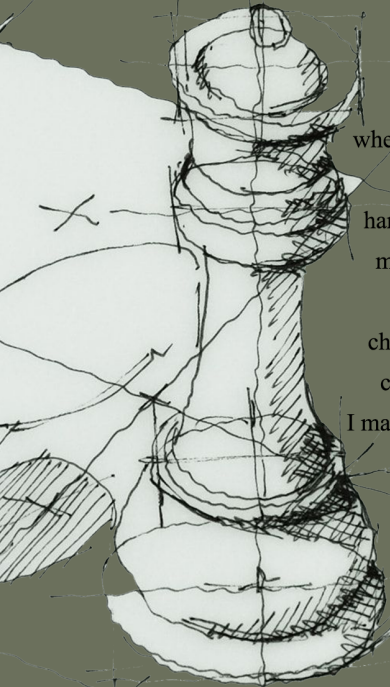
whole time. Like every other time, the white knight captured my king.

I stared at the chess board and that's when a tear fell and then another and another.

They were silent tears that fell into my hands. I don't know how long I sat there for, maybe an hour, maybe two. When the tears ebbed, I wiped my face and stared at the chessboard. Slowly, I stood up, gathered the chess pieces and took them home with me.

I made sure to put the loose brick back when I left. The chess set now sits on the shelf in my room. It is the first thing I see when I wake and the last before I close my eyes at night. Every day, they remind me of my grandad and of the times I spent with him- the advice, the chess games, and

how he smiled kindly at me every time I lost. People tell me to throw the chess set away because it's old and chipped, but it is my most treasured possession. Those pieces hold my memories of my grandad, the ones that I am grateful to have and that I would never give up for a lifetime.





To live a life with just you and I, is truly all I'd want before I die.

I'd hate to be the first to say goodbye, but unlucky for us I ran out of time.

Be mine.

For what time remains, please no more games. Be mine, I whisper beneath the setting sun.

Be mine until our time is done, my life expired, no longer will I be tired.

Freed.

I'd be freed but I'll miss you dearly.

So my dear, simply remember me and our pleasantries and maybe one day we'll meet again.

Before I Die  
by Shannon Farnum



# PROLOGUE: KEYHOLE OBSERVATION

by Jason Wu

The story of the Local Cluster begins in a handful of realities, each an island on the ocean of luminiferous ether between universes. These islands of stability provide sapient life with metaphorical warm puddles from which to rise out of in a great multitude of forms. With the advancement of technology in some of these puddle realities comes the ability to navigate through the ether, and soon universe hopping explorers explode out from the first few realms to have mastered the art and science of traveling through the ether. As the sapient people of the Local Cluster meet each other and political landscapes shift with every new reality discovered, old nations and empires merge into new alliances, signatories, and pacts.

The result of this gradual merging, over the course of thousands of years, are the twin superpowers that now dominate the Local Cluster.

The Unity was born out of a small handful of human civilizations who have mastered the art of bridging the islands of the aptly named Ether Sea at the start of the Sapient Explosion. Their leaders saw themselves as the heralds and prophets of a new epoch, a Shining Path of manifest destiny and human supremacy. They watched other species and people sail the Ether Sea to find new islands of stability; they resolved to combine their purpose into strength and project it outwards so as to bring to fruition their Imperial Dream. They looked into their past and saw a history of civil war and fratricide between fellow humans; they resolved to forge great chains of ideology that will bind the people together against the perilous tides and combine the effort of mankind into an armored gauntlet that will seize the stars. So the Unity came into existence, headed by a Ruling Council representing each and every one of the member states and managed by a handful of minimalist Ministries overseeing interstate cooperation.

The armadas and legions of mankind rode the wavefront of expansion, bringing into their fold those who embraced their ideology and casting back into oblivion those who sought to destroy them. Against crises that arose to threaten their destiny and the stability of the Local Cluster, the Unity launched twelve Solar Crusades of incredible scale to hammer down with unrelenting and unstoppable force. The Imperial Dream grew to encompass first near-humans, then humanoids, and finally all organics who believed the Dream and its promise of a Pax Sapiens and were willing to stand with the Council. As the collective expanded with every passing decade and the need for a robust government grew, the Council forged the minimalist Ministries into a federal government to oversee the increasingly

complex alliance.

The Accord originated as a neutrality pact between a group of nascent states in what can roughly be described as the opposite side of the Local Cluster. These fledgeling republics, unlike their belligerent counterparts crusading through the other side of the Local Cluster, believed in the higher ideals of prosperity through non-aggression, non-interference, and mutual benefit. Their experience of expansion, unlike that of the Unity, was mostly peaceful. They were fortunate to meet many others who shared their ideals, and instead of swinging the bloody-handed gauntlet of war the Accord blossomed by displaying the silken gloved hand of mutual defense and collective prosperity. Many new nations joined their ranks in the coming centuries; in order to manage this new influx, the signatory states formed a Congress of representatives, a basic set of Departments to regulate the bare minimum of interstate relations, and a federal Self-Defense Force, while retaining most political and military power within the hands of the signatory nations.

As the Local Cluster evolved, the Unity and the Accord slowly absorbed or destroyed many other such conglomerates who also sought to secure a seat in the inter-cluster political landscape. The two infant superpowers knew of each other but chose to not clash with each other. There are other nations to extend signatory status to and crusade out of existence; there are still more worlds and realms to be claimed and developed.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end.

The act of traveling between different universes of the Local Cluster, whether through sailing the Ether Sea or bridging the island universes, had the previously unknown effect of causing the baseline realities to slowly mix together over time. Vessels conducting jumps between realities carry a small amount of their origin reality along with them; with enough such vessels traversing the Ether Sea, the more traveled realities slowly homogenizes towards a middle ground.

The primary source of this recombination, however, comes in the form of Jump Gates, toroid megastructures that generate “bridges” of instantaneous travel through the Ether Sea to connect paired Gates. These Jump Gates are the foundation upon which the Unity establishes its power projection capacity and the Accord its defense network and interconnected



economy. These Jump Gates, by deploying a semi-permanent “bridge” between the endpoints, also inadvertently facilitated a much greater level of recombination between the two endpoints.

The outcome of this extended recombination is a new baseline that has replaced the individually different laws of reality and fundamental units of each universe. Vastly different methods of superluminal travel have merged into a middle ground that have inherited the benefits and drawbacks of many of its predecessors. Universes insulated from the Ether Sea, operating on “hard” and non-negotiable science, and their counterparts, infused with the luminiferous ether and displaying “soft” reality alteration mechanisms, have arrived at a middle ground where the collective will of sapience can contend with the immutable rules of existence.

This new baseline, however, contains a fatal flaw.

The new system of superluminal travel, standardized across the realms by recombination, is breaking down for unknown reasons. Though there are distant galaxies beyond the settled ones in each pocket reality of the Local Cluster, the superluminal drives of the Unity and the Accord are no longer capable of reaching those distant galaxies. Exploration ships heading outbound are forced to turn back after a certain distance as the power consumption of their superluminal drives grew first linearly and then exponentially the further out they went. Those who ignored the unsustainable power consumptions of their vessels and pushed onwards were forcibly shunted back into realspace once their reactors can no longer sustain the ravenous superluminal drives. The greatest minds of the Local Cluster are at a loss attempting to explain the cause of this strange restriction.

Compounding this issue is the fact that the twin superpowers have reached the limits of what can be discovered and developed. All of the existing realms have been claimed; all of the nations have aligned themselves with one superpower or the other. Efforts to seek out previously unknown realms in the Ether Sea have found nothing; there is not a single island of stability in the Ether Sea for Jump Gates or Ether Drives to lock onto that is not already a part of the Cluster. Every effort to seek out these hypothetical new universes have returned with the conclusion that the Ether Sea is utterly devoid of pockets of stability outside of the Local Cluster.

As the Unity and the Accord reached their territorial limits, they turned their attention inwards towards the material wealth that they have acquired but yet to spend. By the will of the Council and the signatories,

mega-projects of incredible scale stripped away asteroid belts, moons, and planets, leaving behind ecumenopoli, attack moons, star-lifting arrays, and artificial planetary rings in their wake. The epoch of proliferation, where crises and devouring swarms waited in the dark corners of the still untamed Cluster and the legions of order crusaded against them, is over. In its place is an epoch of peace, a Pax Sapiens where the chaos and uncertainty of the past is a fading memory and the certainty of civilization is the status quo.

However, as the rival superpowers turn inwards and focus on internal development, they are also forced to confront their existential flaws.

The Unity outwardly presents itself as a monolithic collective of people, bound together by great chains of collective purpose and combined power. Its member states, however, are a fractured group each with its own political stances, economic desires, military spendings, and societal prejudices. The Ruling Council, representing each and every one of them, is thus by necessity a standoff of opposing ideologies held together by the rewards of relentless expansion, conquest, and progress. It prospered during the Proliferation Epoch precisely because the Local Cluster provided enemies, crises, and frontiers for the divided member states to focus their undivided effort towards. Now that the frontiers are gone, the member states have nowhere to carve out more but from the Accord and each other. The Ruling Council, the Ministries, and the federal military force became political battlefields through which many of the member states compete for influence and power.

The Accord outwardly presents itself as a society of joint defense, mutual non-interference, self-determination, and mutual economic cooperation. Its signatories, however, see each other as familiar strangers at best and competitors at worst. Unscrupulous politicians and profit minded oligarchs, using signatories and megacorporations as disguises and fronts, siphon wealth into their reserves and away from the common people. The Congress, intentionally structured as a weak legislature incapable of causing permanent and large-scale change, becomes a tribalist distraction for the people where politicians maintain a pretense of equality and justice while moving in circles in such a way that nothing changes. The similarly weakened Departments become part of this greater deception; the Congress elect and remove officials in a pretense of political change, all while these officials do nothing to mend the increasing disparity and inequality. The Proliferation Epoch has provided the Accord and its people with new worlds and realms for its economies to expand into and benefit collectively from; without the frontiers, the signatories begin to cannibalize each other for profit and growth.



The Proliferation Epoch and the Pax Sapiens also saw the rise to dominance of megacorps, commercial enterprises that span across nations and galaxies in search of profit. They consume lesser companies and governments as a cancer metastasizes across healthy musculature, subsuming self-determination with corruption and forming great complexes with local, regional, and federal governments of both superpowers. Chief amongst these complexes is the military-industrial complex, a syncretic creature made of arms manufacturers, private military companies, and unscrupulous politicians. It and other such complexes compete with or subvert signatories and member states for political and economic power, trampling the common people underfoot in the process.

The boundless frontiers of the Proliferation Age has served as an outlet of discontent for the people of the Local Cluster who could not or would not live under the Unity and its imperialist state ideology or the Accord and its incomprehensible web of economic and political relations. Those who chose to live as they please moved out to the frontiers, beyond the reach of the superpowers. The Council and Congress allowed the dissatisfied and discontent to scatter to the winds, allocating their efforts on more important issues. With the end of the Proliferation and the start of the Pax Sapiens, this discontent no longer has anywhere to go. All of the Local Cluster is dominated by one of two superpowers; there is no world beyond the omnipresent sight of the Council and its Ministries or the factionalist nightmare of the Congress and its Departments. The pressure and discontent grew with every passing decade; the restless masses began to see the failures of the bureaucratic monoliths that rule over their existence. Whispers of reform, against corrupt politicians and unchecked megacorporations or sapient rights abuses and weapons of cruelty, grew in volume.

Both the Council and the Congress know without a shadow of doubt that something must budge. They are descending down unsustainable paths of ever-growing greed and consumption; either their internal divisions and desire for each other's wealth will bring the status quo crashing down, or the people's rage against their rulers will usher into existence an age of civil war.

The solution to this arrives at a most opportune time.

Both the Unity and the Accord have invested huge amounts of effort into seeking a solution to the Ether Curtain Problem. The greatest minds of the Local Cluster, under the direct orders of either the Council or a conclave of signatories, toiled endlessly for centuries to seek insight into the superluminal breakdown beyond known space and the apparent nonexistence of new island realities beyond the Local Cluster.

As peace grew increasingly tenuous, these scientists worked to find a temporary outlet for the pressure cooker that is the Local Cluster.

Their efforts pay off five hundred years into the Pax Sapiens when modified "Searchlight" Gates of both superpowers, on a routine sweep for anomalies, simultaneously detect a blip on the Ether Sea. Probes equipped with Ether Drives overcharged to unreasonably unsafe levels take daring one-way dives through the Sea in order to ascertain the nature of the blip.

They found a garden of Eden.

The Searchlight Gates have indeed discovered a new reality in the infinite expanse of the Ether Sea. The probes have returned to reality near the center of an elliptical galaxy of unimaginable scale, dwarfing all of the Local Cluster with fifteen orders of magnitudes of stars. This legendary discovery would be remembered in the history books as the Keyhole Observation, as both Unity and Accord looked through the keyhole of the iron curtain surrounding the Local Cluster and saw salvation.

Initial excitement and confusion soon turned into palpable fear and cold resolve as both Council and Congress understood the enormity of this situation. Whoever reaches Eden first will last forevermore, and the second place will be doomed to boil alive in the pressure cooker that they have built for themselves. The technological and material requirement for a Jump Gate capable of threading the Keyhole and reaching Eden is unfathomable, but with all of the Local Cluster dedicated to the effort, it is an eventuality. The Scramble for Eden is on.

On that fateful day, as sapience peeked through the gates of Eden, the Pax Sapiens came to an end. In its place came the Coldest War, an arms race and military-industrial-technological competition to thread the Keyhole. The winner will attain eternal glory, the loser death by unsustainable stagnation.

# HAPPY TOGETHER

## BY STEPHANIE GONZALEZ

I wandered around Chinatown starry-eyed, comforted by the crisp coldness of a marching winter and the setting sky. I was always the first one to arrive in Manhattan Chinatown for occasional dinners with my two-family household during a school day. I'd enjoy a ride on the B train from Columbus Circle to Grand Street, while the rest of my family traveled from Queens.

Walking into Royal Seafood Restaurant at Mott Street, the usual spot for eleven years, was like being gently engulfed by cadmium red, the most tender color to be invited into. The cadmium red took presence as tablecloths, décor, and as cushion walls where the grand sculptures of the dragon and phoenix rested.

"Oh, you arrived! Where's the rest of your family? Your family's table is this way," said the waiter to me in Cantonese.

I sat eagerly at the large red table waiting for the arrival of cousins, aunts, and uncles, parents, and grandparents.

In the following Spring, COVID-19 had cut my two-family household into one in March 2020. My uncle's relatives had moved into his home as a precaution, leaving me, my brother Frank, my parents, my grandparents, and my great uncle.

"They act as if we're going to give them the virus," snapped my aunt Jojo (my mom's sister), who occasionally lived with us. But we all knew my uncle and his family were innate fussy germaphobes.

We have never returned to the tender cadmium red of Royal Seafood restaurant as a whole family since then.

However, this now one-family household in Queens was bound to shrink once again. My parents had bought their first home for themselves, Frank, and I. Relative to her cousins, who also had lived and raised their families in this two-family household, my mom would be the third child to move out. It was a rite of passage to leave your parents—according to my mom.

"You will not be living with me when you are a grown adult. I rather be put in a nursing home. I will have the money so why not," said mom to me triumphantly.

"One day, you'll just be like grandma. You'll be old and afraid of being alone. You'll want someone to stay with you," I replied.

Though the new home was only a six-minute walk from my grandparents, I felt like I was losing daily life with them. Perhaps describe daily life, and the fact that you were raised by grandparents. It was inevitable that I would move out during the coming November. Still, I enjoyed the remaining Spring, Summer, and Fall in the cluttered, cramped, and loud atmosphere I've called home for twelve years. I finished high school, cut awkward bangs, left traces of myself on the walls and floors through specks of oil paint, exercised with my grandparents, and started college.

I opened my notebook to a page about derivatives to study for my second calculus exam, which took place the first week of November.

Behind me was my grandpa sitting on the couch hitting all four Mandarin tones in his rich, and strong singing voice. I have been reassuring him that I was not bothered.

"Won't you be quiet!? You're disturbing her," barged in my grandma in Cantonese.

\* \* \*

"Grandma does not want you around, you know--but she doesn't want to admit that to not hurt your feelings. You take up space," mom told me the week we had to move.

"You should give more space to your grandparents. You study in the living room, and because of that, your grandpa can't sing, and your grandma cannot watch TV,"



# HAPPY TOGETHER

## BY STEPHANIE GONZALEZ

It was November 24th, the day my parents, Frank, and I were scheduled to move. I sat on the couch with grandpa, who sang along to a recording of himself singing in cheerful Mandarin. I sighed listlessly at the thought of Calculus. Across from us was grandma—she was playing a game on her phone. Since March, both my grandparents relied extensively on digital entertainment to pass time. Grandpa had quit his job as a cab driver, and grandma didn't dare to see her friends to protect themselves from COVID-19. Grandpa made a gesture to me, telling me that grandma was crying. I looked at grandma, whose head was fixed down towards her phone. She went up and walked into Frank's room. From the couch, I heard muffled sobbing. Both Frank and I wrapped our arms around her, with only a few drops of tears—I've done most of grieving privately during the Summer. I walked back into the living room where grandpa was still singing.

My grandparents accompanied us during the move. In a typical November fashion, the pale moon was at its roundest and brightest. It was nice to have a table large enough for all of us to sit together--- we rarely dined together at the two-family household because the dinner table was small, and we had different schedules.

I kissed my grandma goodnight before she left the dinner. I'm only a few blocks away I thought to myself.

I returned to the two-family home to stay for a few days. My grandma awkwardly presented to me the bedroom I used to sleep in.

“You don't have to treat me like a guest,”

At the new home, cadmium red slowly traveled into my bedroom. The vibrant color unraveled itself as blossoms on my bedsheets, the lunar calendar on my door, Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of hell on my wall, DaVinci's charcoal drawing of the Last Supper at my bedside, paint streaks on my belongings... I have settled in.

\* \* \*

My birthday, Christmas, Super Smash Bros with my boyfriend, Hong Kong movies and pizza with my grandparents, the day I taught grandpa how to use Zoom, Lunar New Year in Manhattan Chinatown, the withering red lunar calendar dropped the February page and revealed March.

Our one-family household made use of the couches and my tiny Disney Princess chairs (from when I was in elementary school) to sit around the coffee table to dine at my grandparents'. My grandpa, the plump birthday boy in pajamas, had red cadmium envelopes of money in his shirt pocket. Later that month, for the first time in a year, our one-family household gathered around the red cadmium table—not that of Royal Seafood Restaurant, but of the restaurant that was a block away.

This Asian fights back I wrote on my cardboard sign. With the sign held in my left hand, I held grandma's hand, as we walked from Chinatown to City Hall, onto the Brooklyn Bridge with hundreds of other New Yorkers during the April Stop Asian Hate Rally. Grandma, Grandpa, and their friends proudly smiled and waved small- U.S flags at the sight of my camera-- the promising Manhattan skyline behind them. Mesmerized by the merry attitude, as they marched along the iconic Brooklyn Bridge, as if they knew they rightfully belonged to New York City, I forgot to press record.

