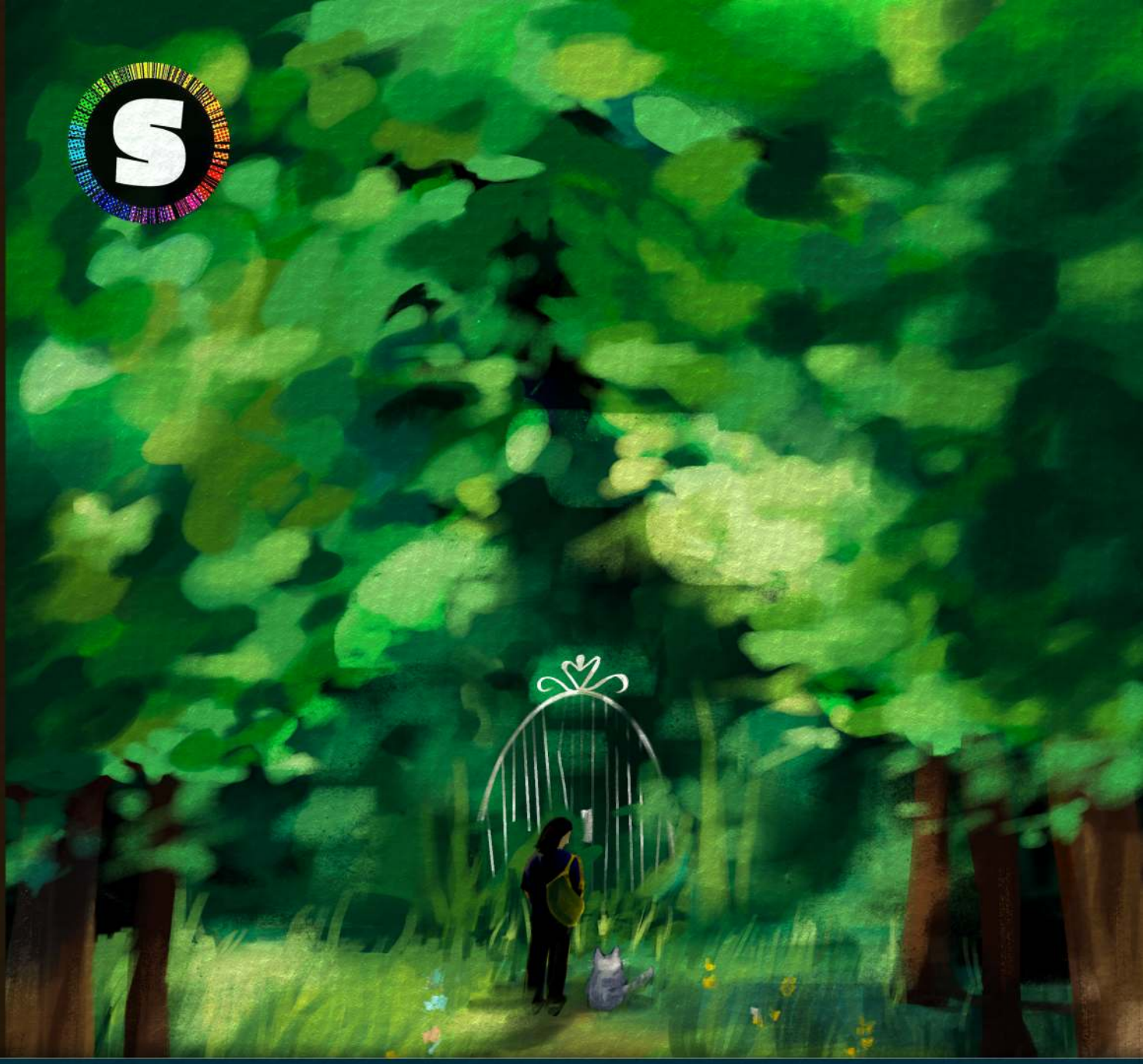

『Gratitude, Warmth & Coolness』

『Winter, Reunion』

『Celebrating Friendship, Rejection』

『New Beginnings, Female Empowerment』

SCRIBE

or's Edition

May 2022 Issue

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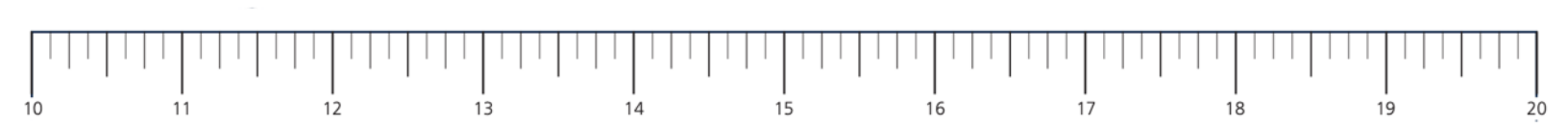

Dear Reader,

Take a deep breath…the end of the semester is nigh.

Take a look around…the maple tree branches are draped in verdant garlands and feathered songbirds are overcome with joyous tunes.

Take a glance at the tabloids…Russia v. Ukraine, Elon Musk v. Twitter, the Supreme Court v. abortion rights—the list goes on.

Why is it that life juxtaposes some of our most beautiful experiences with the most ugliest?

Perhaps that's a question left better off for our philosophy majors.

In the meantime, however, let us enjoy the way that we creative writers have captured the essence of this paradox in our writings about new beginnings—the beautiful and the ugly.

So take another deep breath…and enjoy this special collector's edition of SCRIBE magazine until we return to you in the fall.

Signing off,

Rida Ahmed
Editor-in-Chief

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『Bookmark』

Illustrated by Bridget Li

TO-DO

I come from a planet where everyone is equal, men and women are subjected to equality and the only difference is in their body. But, when I ventured down to Earth, I noticed that these creatures have trapped themselves into a societal prison. Apparently if you are a man or a woman you have to behave a certain way. To amuse myself and to rid myself of boredom, I decided to live on Earth as a female and this is my experience.

From a young age, girls are taught that one day a prince charming, or a knight in shining armor will come and save you. From a young age girls are taught that your looks matter more than your brain does.

Then as girls mature, we are taught that your clothes define who you are. If you are showing skin, you are labeled as whore, but if you indulge in wearing sweatpants, and sweaters rather than dresses and heels then you are labeled as a tomboy. As women mature, we are taught to never voice our opinions strongly because then you will be seen as aggressive or that the boys don't like talkative girls. If we are smart, we should never show it. In the media CEO's are often displayed as men wearing red ties and it's good being assertive but if women do it then she must be on her period. Oh the heaven, if a woman expresses her opinion in an assertive manner then it must be due to

her body- not because she can ever have some constructive feedback!

Then, we also have an amazing set of double standards for women too. The term chatty-cathy refers to a talkative woman, but have you noticed that there is no such thing for men? Same goes for the idea of being a whore, it is mostly referenced for women because if a man sleeps around- it's acceptable because it gaining experience.

Now, after reading this you might think I hate men which many have claimed that I have because I am vocal about my opinions but I don't hate men. In fact men have their own set of issues and standards that society places on them. For example, boys aren't supposed to cry, why because real men don't cry? But why can't men be free to express their emotions? Why is it that women are deemed to be too emotional but men shouldn't be emotional at all? Society needs to change and both men and women have to work towards this change. By claiming that one hates another that immediately blocks the issues at hand and instead goes in a blaming game.

written by Gadharv Kaur

See also: Mutually Assured Destruction

First Strike

Jason Wu

In military strategy, a first strike is a preemptive surprise attack against another state and its military-industrial capacity with the intention of crippling the opposing state's ability to retaliate in kind in a short period of time (usually defined as within three days). It is named after the planetary nuclear strategy of the same name due to the roughly equivalent orders of magnitude between the weapons used and their intended targets in both cases.

Background

The concept of the First Strike and its theoretical execution relies on the existence of weapons capable of threatening entire planets and their inhabitants and delivery mechanisms capable of transporting these weapons across thousands of light years and the Interstitial Sea to their target. Due to the ability of all sides to withstand tactical fission, fusion, and combination warheads, the weapons of a First Strike must be able to totally incapacitate or destroy the planet, station, or megastructure targeted by one or more such weapons. Due to the size scale of the various state actors in the Local Cluster, stretching across thousands of light years and sometimes across realities, the delivery mechanisms of First Strike weapons must be able to cross both normal reality and the poorly understood Interstitial Sea.

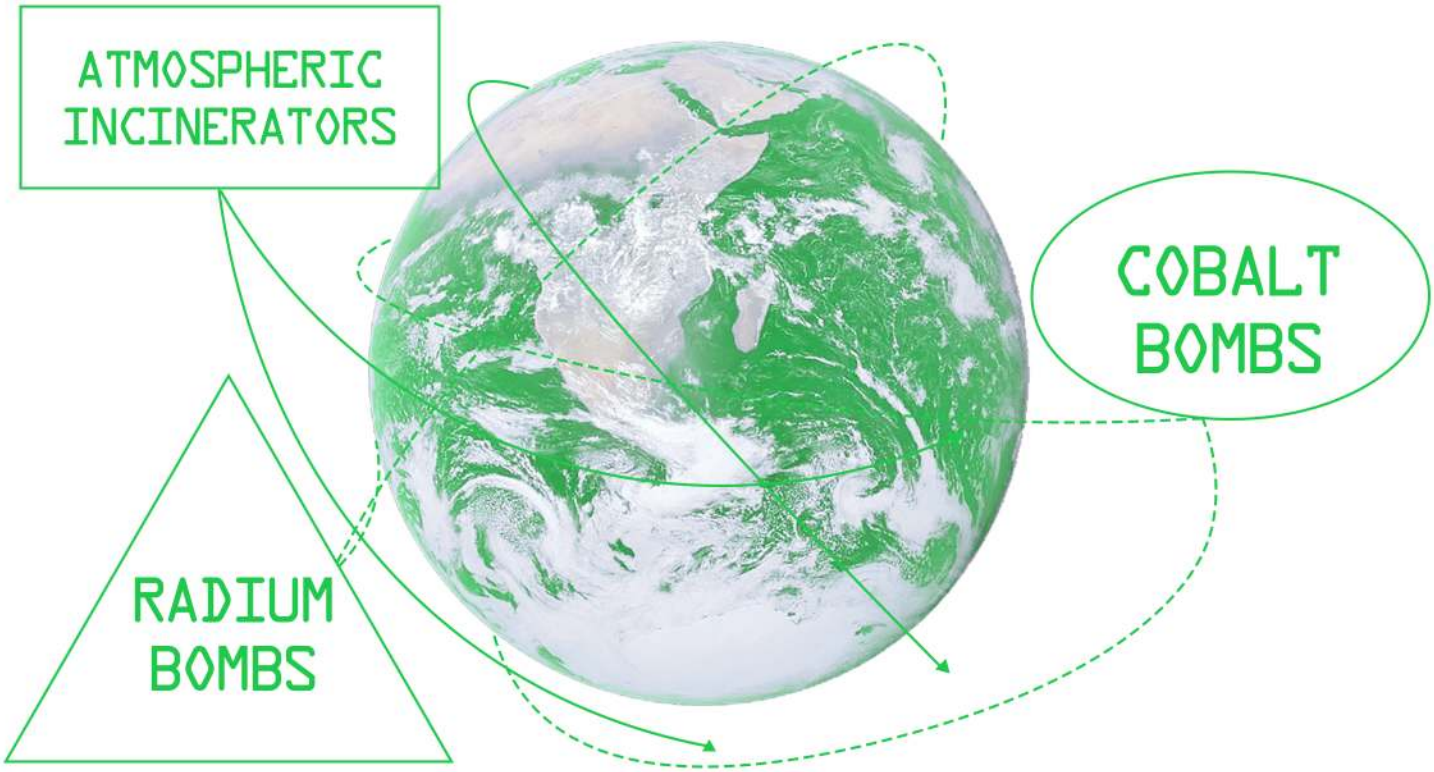
Over the course of the Sapient Proliferation, the Collective Security Union ("Union" / CSU) and the Accord of Free Nations ("Accord" / AFN) created vast arsenals of First Strike capable munitions and their delivery mechanisms as offensive or defensive deterrents respectively. The Union uses its arsenal to intimidate lesser nations into acting in line with the Council's foreign policy, deter any possible attempts by the Accord to intervene in their imperialist expansion, and provide for a tactical resolution to particularly hardened defenses in an active war. The Accord uses its arsenal to deter attacks and invasions launched against its signatories, promising massive retaliation against any power that may seek to destroy its people and ideals.

Though there was no overt hostility between the two superpowers, both sides considered the possibility of a First Strike and corresponding massive retaliation between the twin superpowers of the Local Cluster. Though the Union and the Accord are theoretically capable of surviving a First Strike with sufficient remaining capacity to wage conventional warfare against each other, the incalculable devastation that will inevitably result from such an exchange will cripple both sides for centuries to come. The deterrence of civilian and military loss great enough to potentially lead to state collapse thus prevented either side from using First Strike weapons in anger against each other or against an aligned state.

However, despite knowing the unpayable price of a full First Strike exchange and thus having no desire of enacting such an event, both superpowers privately feared that the other may believe itself to be capable of enduring the consequences and proceed with a First Strike.

This caused both sides to invest heavily in both expanding the existing arsenal and developing new offensive or defensive branches of the First Strike doctrine. Both sides hoped that they would be able to create such a vast and credible threat that a theoretical First Strike event would would guarantee nothing less than mutually assured destruction. In

conjunction, both superpowers invested greatly in defense countermeasures of all types intended to lessen the material costs of a First Strike event.



Weapons

Because of the scale of civilian and military infrastructures employed by both the Union and the Accord, First Strike payloads must be capable of causing crippling damage to a wide variety of targets.

Atmospheric Incinerators: A family of super-heavy multiple stage fission-fusion warheads, utilizing the Teller-Ulam design to achieve the equivalent power of many gigatons of TNT, designed to ignite the atmosphere of the targeted planet and cause a runaway nuclear fusion reaction. They are effective against other types of targets as well due to the size of the warhead(s) in question. They are used as countervalue weapons to target civilian infrastructure of both planet-bound and free orbiting variety.

Cobalt Bombs: A family of fission-fusion or pure fission "dirty bombs" designed to scatter large quantities of radioactive fallout over an area in order to deny civil and military usage in the long term. They are used as countervalue weapons against hostile planets and other objects with significant gravity wells and developed civil infrastructure. Their name references the isotope Cobalt-60, one of the earliest isotopes used in this role.

Radium Bombs: A family of fission-fusion or pure fission bombs designed to maximise generation of direct radiation (especially of gamma and neutron variety). They are used as counterforce and countervalue weapons against a wide variety of targets.

Super-heavy Lances: Powerful direct energy weapons used by some super-capitals and attack moons. They are used as decapitation weapons against high value targets whose destruction must be guaranteed by overwhelming and direct firepower.

Bioweapons: Various engineered infectious diseases with long incubation times, high transmissibility, and highly incapacitating symptoms designed to cripple a targeted state's civil and military structure. Unlike other First Strike munitions, these diseases are often delivered by individual agents striking directly at the heart of population centers and logistical crossroads. Many nations consider the use of these weapons to be morally unjustifiable and the Accord of Free Nations has outlawed usage of biological weapons in response to this. Rumors claim that the Collective Security Union maintains a stockpile of engineered diseases, however the Union has denied all such claims and no accuser has succeeded in producing conclusive proof.

Other: Various other First Strike weapons that are considered to be anomalous or esoteric are placed under this category. An example of such weapons include the "Ether Lance", a weapon of indeterminate function that the Union claims can bypass all manners of active and passive countermeasures.

Delivery systems

An effective First Strike delivery system must be able to transport one or more payloads from their area of deployment to the appropriate destinations without detection, interdiction, and destruction by enemy forces.

Cruise Torpedoes: Oversized torpedoes equipped with a Superluminal Drive that allows it to target intraversal targets within varying ranges. Early versions have relatively limited superluminal effective ranges, however the latest cruise torpedoes in service as of the Coldest War are capable of reaching any target of any known nation from any other point in the same nation. Few cruise torpedoes are equipped with Jump Drives due to the difficulty involved in producing the latter in large quantities.

Cruise torpedoes may carry a single large warhead or multiple independent sub-munitions, each capable of subluminal travel.

Kill Ships: Various patterns of repurposed torpedo cruisers equipped with Jump Drives and partial stealth technology designed to carry a number of cruise torpedoes on interversal attacks. Each kill-ship will transport its cargo of lethal payloads into the home setting of a targeted state, deploy the torpedoes, and allow the torpedoes to deliver the First Strike payloads to their targets under their own power.

The CSU Armada deploys the Electron, Neutron, and Neutrino class kill-ships as a part of its First Strike arm.

Arsenal Ships: Various patterns of super-capital warships designed to carry large numbers of cruise torpedoes on interversal attacks. Each Arsenal Ship carries the equivalent First Strike capacity of dozens of Kill Ships and will usually be the first to launch in the event of a First Strike. By packing a quantity of cruise torpedoes into a single well-protected ship with a single Jump Drive instead of multiple lesser ships each with their own Jump Drives, proponents of the arsenal ship claim that a prospective nation can free up Jump Drives for more useful purposes.

The CSU Armada deploys the Angel

of the Apocalypse, a Terminus class dreadnought, as an arsenal ship.

Torpedo Barges: Large transport craft equipped with a Jump Drive and designed to carry a number of kill-ships within its cavernous holds. A fully loaded torpedo barge can rival smaller arsenal ships in attack capacity. Proponents of the torpedo barge claim that, instead of wasting copious time and effort reloading arsenal ships at naval yards that would surely be prime First Strike targets, a prospective nation can instead use barges to quickly gather up already loaded kill-ships on the move and carry out secondary or retaliatory strikes with less delay.

Jump Gate: It is possible to use one-way Jump Gate funnels to deliver large quantities of payloads into a target universe. The effectiveness of such a tactic in flooding an enemy with cruise torpedoes is undermined by the nature of Jump Gates as first priority First Strike targets, meaning that any Gate used for such a purpose will almost definitely come under attack.

Countermeasures

Terminal defenses: Any localized mechanism that allows a target of a First Strike to prevent any number of incoming munitions from scoring a mission kill.

Active measures, such as in-system point / area defense networks, directly destroy or incapacitate incoming munitions.

Passive measures, such as planetary shields, allow the target to withstand and survive a First Strike attack.

Some measures such as interdiction fields can be categorized as either passive or active depending on the role they are used in.

Early warning: Any method, whether it be tactical, strategic, or diplomatic, of detecting an imminent First Strike or hostile intentions of carrying out such an attack that allows a state to ready its countermeasures, deterrence mechanisms, and/or retaliatory capacity.

Deterrence mechanisms

In order to prevent hostile states from considering a First Strike, a properly equipped state must be able to establish itself to be able to credibly survive said First Strike and reply with massive retaliation.

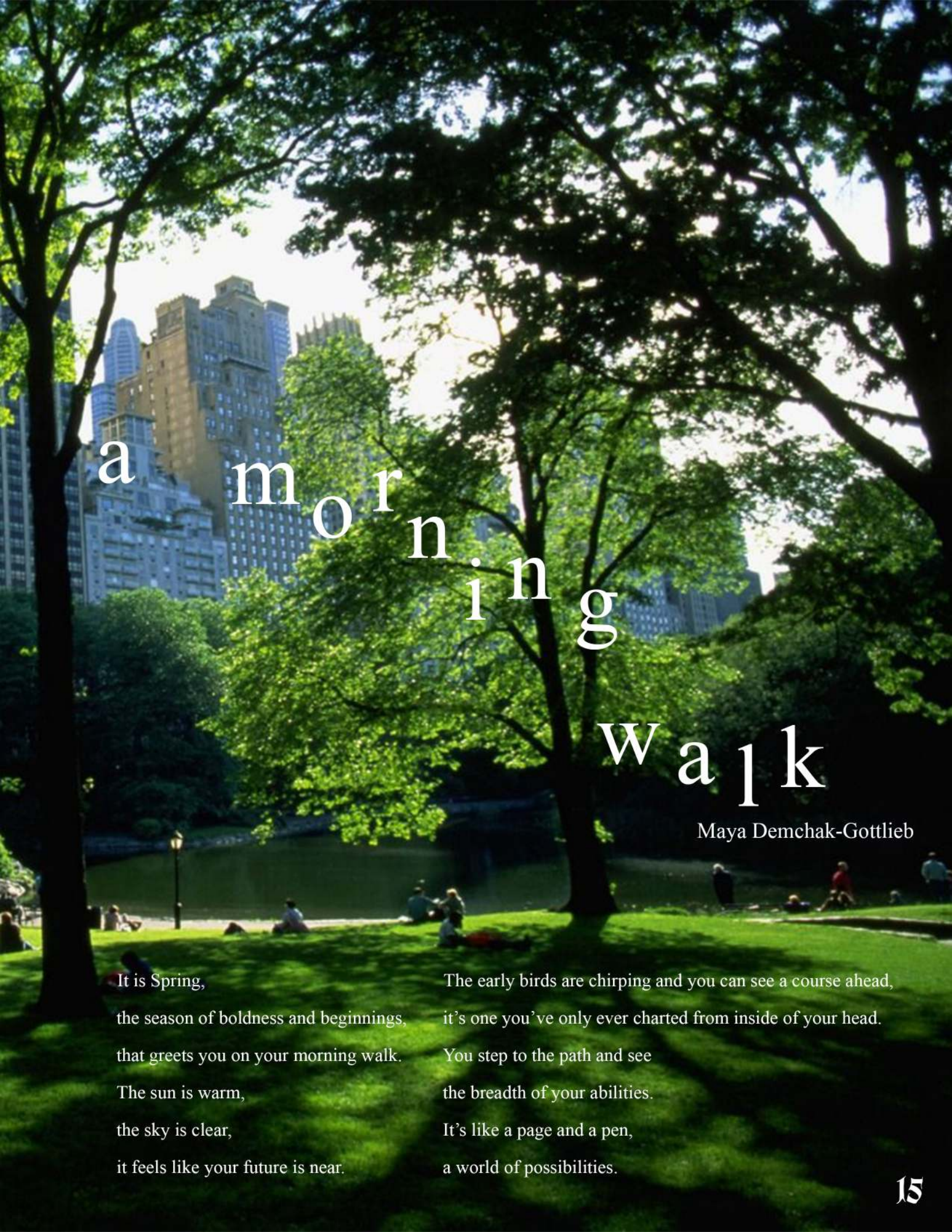
Readiness states: By maintaining a heightened readiness state during times of increased tension, a state presents itself to be capable of surviving a First Strike via mobilization of its own interversal strike capacity. This presents a credible threat to a possible hostile state who may choose to refrain from launching an attack if it perceives its enemy to be too dangerous to safely attack.

Strike platform mobility: By activating kill ships, arsenal ships, and torpedo barges and sending them away from their usual home docks during a high readiness scenario, a state greatly increases the chance of each delivery platform surviving or evading a counterforce attack.

Strategic and operational redundancy: By establishing multiple layers of command of control intended to survive the opening salvos of a First Strike, a state presents itself to be capable of surviving a decapitation strike and issuing orders for immediate and massive retaliation.

Automated response: An interversal strike capable state may choose to establish a dead man's switch that will allow the destruction of its civilian or military leadership in combination with a detected First Strike to immediately set off massive retaliation. The existence of such a system, in combination with redundancy and readiness, can almost guarantee a state's ability to respond in force against a hostile First Strike.

The Union claims to have implemented a dead man's switch system that would preserve their capacity for retaliation even after the total destruction of its civilian and military leadership. The validity of this claim is unknown.



a morning walk

Maya Demchak-Gottlieb

It is Spring,
the season of boldness and beginnings,
that greets you on your morning walk.
The sun is warm,
the sky is clear,
it feels like your future is near.

The early birds are chirping and you can see a course ahead,
it's one you've only ever charted from inside of your head.
You step to the path and see
the breadth of your abilities.
It's like a page and a pen,
a world of possibilities.

Why I Love Christmas
Rosalynn Ye

Every Christmas Eve, my mom's side of the family and I gather around the large Christmas tree set up at my po po's (grandma's) house. The Christmas tree is dressed in the usual - shiny silver and red balls hang from its branches and a silver tinsel and a long green string of little light bulbs wrap around the tree. A cute blue and white penguin wearing gold earmuffs lays on the top of the tree in place of a star. As my siblings and I wait for the rest of the families to arrive, I think about the reasons why I love Christmas.

During this time of the year, New York City is sparkling with magic. I remember, the moment my friend and I stepped out of the subway station in Manhattan, we were immediately struck with awe. With either yellow or blue Christmas lights strung across the streets and wrapped around every tree, the city looked so pretty. It's as if someone had set off fireworks, bursting with color and bright light in the pitch dark, except the magic in those moments became frozen in time. The city isn't the only thing that's lit up. People's faces glow like stars in the night sky. The streets are filled with crowds of people laughing and smiling, as they sing along to Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You" and other jolly Christmas music blasting from the stores. Like one big family, people gather around the Rockefeller Tree to admire its beauty and celebrate this joyous time of the year. The entire atmosphere is full of so much happiness.

And then, of course, there's the presents. I'm not a child anymore, and yet I still hope for presents. You could call me shallow when I say that this is one of my favorite parts of Christmas. However, I don't care about

materialistic things. What I crave is the feeling of knowing that someone thought of me - that someone remembers and actually cares about me. It makes me happy to think about how one of my friends or family members look around the store or browse the web, thinking something like, "Ooh I remember her favorite color is yellow!" or "I think she would look pretty in this dress!" So of course, I don't really love Christmas because of the presents. I love the holiday season because it's a time when we remember to think of our loved ones.

And finally, the warmth that comes from the reunion. During the months prior, everyone's busy working and too consumed with their own lives. Especially with the pandemic going on, it has been so hard to see everyone. I miss my relatives, and the liveliness and chaos that comes when we're all together, such as watching my grandma yelling at my baby cousin to not break anything. Or the time when my mischievous older cousin was hopping away with his sprained ankle while being chased by one of my aunts. I remember giggling over my cousin's shoulder as she added yet another picture to her collection of my dad sleeping amidst the noise.

As the rest of the families arrive, I am quickly enveloped by my aunts and cousins, as they pull me in tightly for a hug. Like standing in front of a burning fireplace (or actually a heater, for technology has come a long way), it feels so comforting and warm in the 30 degree fahrenheit weather.

I want to be consumed by the happiness, love, liveliness, chaos, and warmth that Christmas brings.

And that is why I love Christmas.

Somebody
Tzippora Applebaum

I'm not changed and I'm not new
My past's plain for you to view
Missed chances and forgotten dreams
The only thing I kept is me

Others have had their life's break
They've made friends and good mistakes
A past filled with hope and pride
A life that was lived, not survived

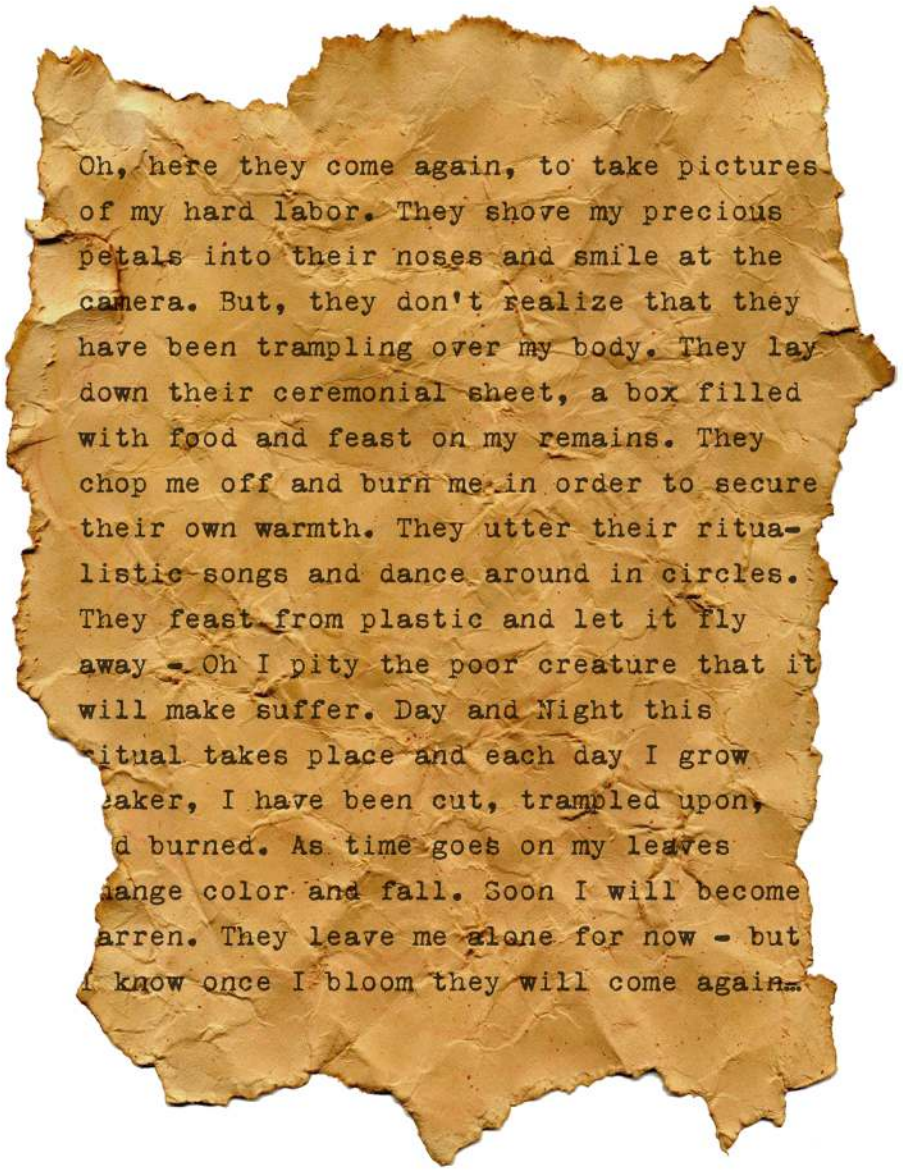
Shades are down, the dark's blinding
An end that never begined
I am not special or cool, not like you
When everyone looks at me, they say "who?"

But tomorrow's a new day
A bright sun, a brand-new way
A chance for me to make a good friend
To live a life with a happy end

What could happen if I would
Sometimes I wonder if I should
Try for the first time
To make my life mine

A nobody, a no one
The one who is always shunned
I know that's not me
Plain for you to see

I have a wish to come true
Courage who I never knew
Now, at this time, please don't fail me
As I dare to become somebody



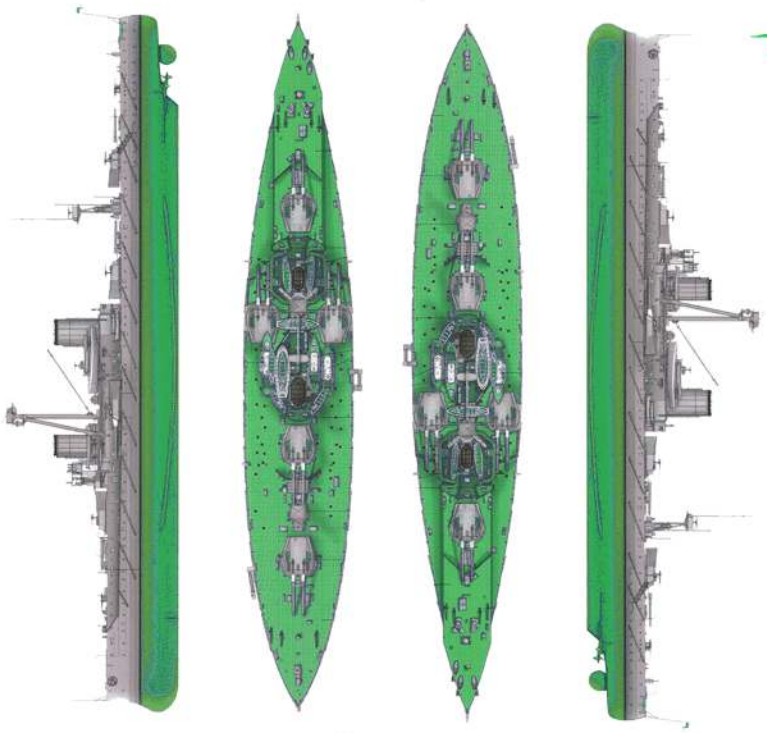
here they come

gadharv kaur

Lance

Jason Wu

ALL
OR
NOTHING



See also: Direct energy weapons

The Lance family of weapons is the primary heavy armament of capital ships fielded by the Collective Security Union and its Armada.

Description

The Lance is a large warship mounted weapon whose origins have long since been lost to the sands of time. The Lance empties banks of supercapacitors to trigger controlled fusion reactions in focusing chambers, directing the resulting plasma and energy in luminal beams to shatter shield matrices, immolate armor belts, and reduce lesser ships to ashes. The high- damage output and long reload time of Lance weapons mean that they, unlike most other capital-grade weapons, fire in volleys punctuated by charging times rather than in continuous bursts.

Over the course of the Sapient Proliferation, the designs for the Lance have been acquired by disparate nations and the venerable weapon has been sighted on the hulls of warships of a dozen different navies.

Various patterns of the Lance exist, each fine-tuned to fit one purpose or another. The Disruption Lance, combining stolen and reverse-engineered Disruptor technology with the venerable and reliable Lance, is hyper-specialized towards targeting shields. A volley from a Disruption Lance will leave its victims vulnerable to attacks upon its armor as its shield matrices fight to seal the breaches opened up by the static-gray Disruption beams. The Radium Lance channels and directs fast neutrons from fusion sources with neutron reflector mirrors to irradiate prospective targets, weakening materials and giving insufficiently protected victims a miserable death through acute radiation syndrome. Though ethically controversial in many nations and deemed useless outside of terror attacks by most, the Radium Lance remains in the arsenals of a few states. These and many other patterns make up the sea of Lance types available to the navies of the Local Cluster. Of these patterns, however, only one succeeded in becoming as ubiquitous as its predecessor.

The Solar Lance, conceptualized near the end of the 2nd Solar Crusade, designed during the interwar period, and put into mass production shortly before the start of the 3rd Solar Crusade, is the equivalent of a heavy Lance. It consumes significantly more power than a standard Lance but releases the additional energy in golden beams that immolate armor into plasma and flay shields into storms of energy feedback. The Solar Lance has two major sub-patterns: the Flare pattern makes use of a triple barrel setup while the Ejection pattern mounts a quadruple barrel setup

on one turret. The Solar Ejection pattern Lance consumes a prodigious amount of energy and the installation of such a weapon comes at the cost of other weapons removed to free up power. As with its predecessor, the Solar Lance has its own family of other sub-patterns each designed for a specific purpose.

Naval Doctrine

See also: Alpha strike, All or nothing (weapons)

Standard and Solar patterns Lances are the longest ranged, fastest acting, and most powerful direct fire weapons on Armada warships capable of containing them, striking first against the enemy while other weapons are either out of range or still in transit due to much slower payloads. Due to these tactical advantages that Lances provide over other weapons, entire portions of Armada naval doctrine have been built around offensive or defensive usage of the Lance.

The "All or Nothing" armament scheme is a method of Armada warship armament, especially those of the super-capital tonnage class (colloquially known to most as battleships and dreadnoughts), where the warship in question is equipped with uniform main batteries of (Solar) Lance (or equivalent) weapons, secondary area defense missile arrays, terminal CIWS / C-RAM point defense batteries, and no medium size weapons of any type. Armada doctrine requires all super-capitals in active service to deploy with a sizable contingent of escorts at all times; it is thus believed that secondary batteries of medium tonnage weapons will be made obsolete by the cruisers and destroyers accompanying the super-capital into battle. The new super-capital under the all-or-nothing armament scheme is an ironclad beast intended to duel with other battleships while its escorts screen against torpedo boats, destroyers, and strike craft that might endanger the super-capital by outrunning the slow traverse speed of most capital grade turrets.

Complementing the all or nothing armament scheme is the alpha strike, conceived during the interwar period between the 3rd and 4th Solar Crusades, whereby a formation of ships fire their weapons in such a way that their target(s) will be hit by a mass of attacks in a short window of time. The standardized capital weapons of the all or nothing scheme simplifies fire control calculations and allows for alpha strikes of uniform weapons instead of disorganized bursts of weapons of varying metrics.

Pulsar Lance

The conceptualization of the alpha strike also led to the development of even larger Lance weapons. The strategists and tacticians who conceived the alpha strike believed that, in order to complement the alpha strike, certain super-capitals should be outfitted with super-heavy Lance weapons (or equivalent) of a far greater magnitude of power than the largest of Solar Lances. Such a theoretical Lance weapon will deliver a devastating opening strike against the enemy at long range. Such an idea quickly gained traction with the higher echelons of the Armada whose fixation on ever larger weapons fit with the theories on the spinal Lance. With the eventual approval of the Ruling Council and the political support of the Armada Marshals, MoD RDI issued calls to various megacorporations in the defense industry for credible proposals and prototypes for a super-heavy Lance weapon and promising military contracts to the group whose proposal and prototype are accepted by the MoD.

The Pulsar Lance, the product of several such contracts, is a spine-mounted supersized Lance weapon of incredible power usage and similarly incredible destruction. It is named after the powerful electromagnetic beams generated by rotating neutron stars that irradiate unfortunate neighbors, alluding to its power relative to lesser patterns of Lances. Its design is deceptively simple for a device of its size; it operates on mechanisms identical to those of the generic Lance but is orders of magnitudes larger than its predecessors. Huge towers of supercapacitors and batteries, each larger than entire Solar Lances, circle the Pulsar Lan-

ce's focusing chamber and siphon torrents of charge from the primary reactors of the warship in question. When the firing sequence is carried out, the combined charge of the towers are dumped into the focusing chamber alongside large quantities of fuel to trigger a yellow-white eruption of plasma and radiation directed forward towards whatever is in its way.

The act of actively charging the capacitor towers of a Pulsar Lance at full speed draws usable energy from other systems, noticeably reducing the combat capacity of the ship wielding the Pulsar Lance. Even at full charge speed, the Pulsar Lance requires significant time to be brought up to fire-ready status and longer for maximum power. Armada naval doctrine thus calls for pre-charging of the towers before an expected battle against an adversary of near or greater tonnage in order to allow for a greater alpha strike against the enemy. However, some captains may still order charging of the Pulsar Lance even in the midst of a slugging match with opposing super-capitals. A full discharge of a Pulsar Lance can cripple a super-capital, atomize lesser ships, and deliver significant devastation to space stations and attack moons - an amount of firepower that might be able to turn the tide of a battle, an amount that may be worth the reduced damage output during the charging phase.

Due to the significant effort required to equip older dreadnoughts with Pulsar Lances, owing to the mass restructuring required to free up space for the spinal weapon, and the high economic and logistical cost of constructing and maintaining Pulsar Lances, only a small portion of newer dreadnought patterns are equipped with Pulsar Lances. These dreadnoughts usually serve as the lead ships of their respective divisions, privileged with more numerous escorts and tasked with the purpose of delivering lethal opening alpha strikes against near peer adversaries.

Quasar Lance

The Quasar Lance, a successor of the Pulsar Lance developed over decades of gradual improvement, is greater in magnitude than the Pulsar Lance in every field - hitting harder and farther while draining more power and costing more to construct and maintain. Following the naming convention of the Pulsar Lance, the Quasar Lance is named after the electromagnetic storms around active galactic nuclei that sterilize any and all life unfortunate to exist within many light-years of the nuclei without protection.

Its creation was spurred by the Armada Marshals, who saw the increasingly large and chaotic battles of the later Solar Crusades as indication that the Pulsar Lance was no longer sufficient. However, Pulsar Lances are already pushing the limit of what can be fitted in a dreadnought. Any significant upgunning of the Pulsar Lance will require a corresponding increase in size, support equipment count, and logistical trail. Installing such a weapon within a conventional dreadnought pattern will lead to an unacceptable drop in conventional combat capacity.

Due to the logistical limitations, Quasar Lances are deployed sparingly on the small number of attack moons and select Terminus dreadnoughts fielded by the Armada. The former contains sufficient volume to contain the additional support elements of the Quasar Lance and still maintain a tolerable conventional armament while the latter are flagships of the Armada and thus are equipped with both more powerful weapons and more capable support modules compared to the line and file.

Its capacity for devastation matches a weapon of its logistical footprint; a full charge direct hit from its blinding white beam is lethal to nothing less than an attack moon and only well established planetary shield networks can survive a Quasar Lance hit without falling. Despite the usage of larger hulls to contain its support modules, however, super-capitals equipped with the Quasar Lance still suffer from firepower drops when charging the weapon at full speed. This, alongside the longer charging time, relegates Quasar Lance equipped units to using their superweapon in their opening salvo to immediately neutralize one or

more enemy high value targets.

Blazar Lance

The final evolution of Lance weapons was created by the desires of a few to create the ultimate wunderwaffe of directed energy weapons.

The Blazar Lance started as a paper weapon, a device only discussed in documents, due to the impracticality of such a weapon. The conclusion of various RDI experts puts the construction of a Blazar Lance as a supremely expensive undertaking, an effort that would equal that of building entire dreadnoughts. These experts know of no problem that the Blazar Lance can solve that cannot be also solved by several Pulsar Lances, and thus the weapon was deemed by most as nothing more than a fanciful thought experiment.

However, despite these issues, the few voices urging for the creation of a Blazar Lance as a proof of concept received significant support from higher powers. Though the official documents provide no additional information, rumors claim that at least one Envoy of the Council placed their implicit or explicit support behind the motion to construct a Blazar Lance. The motion was fast-tracked through the Ministry of Defense's procurement system, superseding several other projects in resource allocation priority. The planning and execution of the Special Project established to create the weapon occurred during the height of the interwar peace between the 11th and 12th Solar Crusades, and its first and only produced unit saw battle in the latter conflict.

The Blazar Lance's name, following the naming convention of previous Lance weapons, references the luminal jets of energy ejected by supermassive black holes at the center of active galactic nuclei. The Blazar Lance takes the concept of a spinal Lance weapon to its logical conclusion by disregarding cost and logistics and min-maxing for pure destructive power. Its capacity to threaten anything and everything that either the Union or the Accord can field in battle is offset by the immense logistical trail required to maintain and operate it and the incredible (even for Terminus dreadnoughts and attack moons) amounts of energy required to power it.

Due to the extreme cost of constructing such a weapon, only one Blazar Lance has been produced. The sole example, serving as a proof of concept, is currently installed within the Empire's Shadow, a Terminus dreadnought operated by the Armada and modified to allow it to wield this wonder weapon. This modification allows the Empire's Shadow to wield the Blazar Lance as a lesser ship would a Pulsar Lance, with the downside that it is comparatively weaker to standard Terminus dreadnoughts in terms of conventional weapons.

The Hunt

Daniel Wronski

prologue.

Ominous we're here, ain't it?" chuckled Pete.

It's been ten years," muttered James while shifting his grip on the rifle. "Nothing's going to happen to us."

James was the more wary of the pair of the hunters. The two were venturing through the California mountains, roughly one hundred miles outside of San Francisco. "Some even say it was just a loony gang of hunters who killed the bear that killed one of their own.

Oh, come on now. There were over fifty holes in that bear's body, and not one bullet was found. The cuts were thicker than knives, and there's no way it was another bear because-

Because something ate it down to the bones. I know. Let's just get a buck and go home."

Pete smirked and looked at James while stepping over a thick cluster of tree roots. "Seems like this is the year you'll get over it." Under Pete's foot, there was a crackling sound as he stepped on a pile of twigs.

James was more graceful and hardly made any noise as he followed Pete through the thick brush. "I'd rather see the beast first, from a safe distance obviously."

"You would have a better chance of getting a buck to pose for you when you find one."

"Maybe a better chance of finding one at-"

He stopped short after he was spooked by a rustle in the bushes behind them. "Pete, hang on."

"You heard that, too, right?" Pete asked. He glanced at James with a con-

cerned look as he approached the bush.

"Pete, careful."

He ignored James and poked his rifle through the bush hastily. Nothing happened. But then he shouted, reached into the bush with one hand, and pulled out a handful of leaves. James jumped back, only to find those leaves shoved his face, with Pete's smirking expression appearing behind the leaves. "Stop that, you idiot," said James as he shoved Pete's hands away. "That's enough of your-"

Another rustle silenced him.

With an expression of genuine curiosity, Pete handed his rifle to James and reached deeper into the bushes with both hands this time. After spreading the bushes apart, he realized what was making the noise: a snake. It was colored an oily green and marked with black spots down its midline. As it slowly slid towards the open that Pete made, the snake seemed to be calm and peaceful. He let go of the bushes, letting them drift slowly back into place, but after he stood up, he froze. The pair of hunters heard a soft, crunching sound come from the bushes, which now stood below Pete's knee. Pete felt it and knew. James heard it and knew. The snake had bit him.

James's eyes widened. "Don't move. Not another step, Pete."

Pete nodded carefully and looked sharply at James. "Shoot it. Shoot the damn thing. It's right under… right under…" His eyes were darting in all different directions, and his mouth twitched in fear as he finally cried, "I can't move my-"

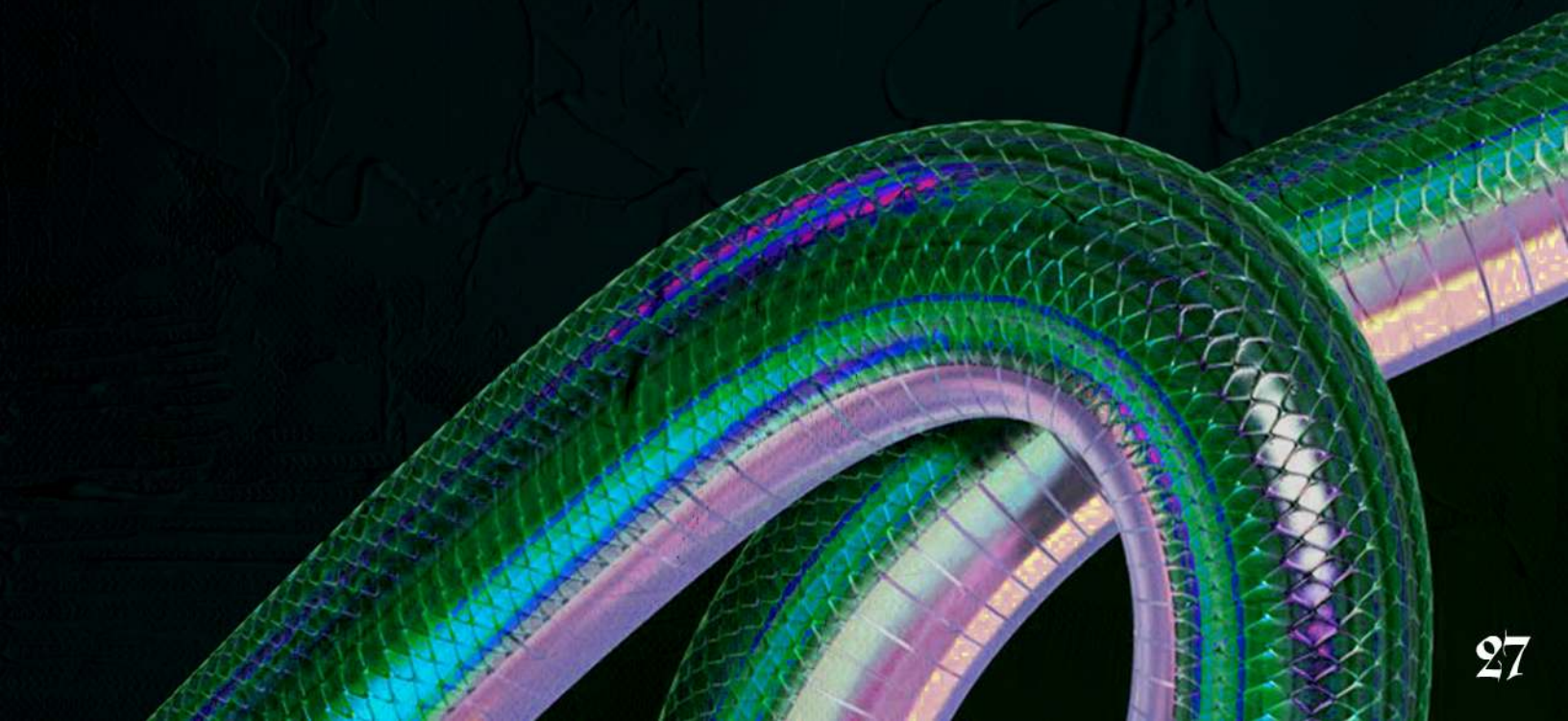
He couldn't finish the sentence. What followed was a loud scream as he was somehow brought down flat on his face and pulled into the depths of the forest

behind the bushes. Quickly, James took his first step to follow the screams, but a gurgling roar and a sickening snap sounding behind him made James instinctively turn around.

To greet him were a pair of dull eye slits on the reptilian head of a beast. It stood on green, furry legs that connected to an equally furry and green torso.

But what surprised James the most were the arms. They were oscillating, like radio waves, and were no thicker than his own lanky arms. But the black spots on the arms of the beast gave away exactly what they were before he could see what was gripped in their fangs: the arms were snakes. They hissed as loud as the monster roared. To James's astonishment, both snakes had one half of Pete's body dangling in their fangs.

It was only a moment after James turned to run when he felt the hot, horrid breath of the Beast. Even as it sank its teeth into his neck, James somehow felt his legs carrying himself forward, further and further away from the pain.



Every New Beginning In Me

WORDS Sajida Ahmed

Every new beginning sprouts from a wilted closure
A closure curled inwards from lack of nurture or care
or from failure
Every wilted leaf must fall away
To welcome faces of the newly born and innocent.

Every new beginning is a sudden whisper
That tells us we have not done
Enough
Every step forward taken begrudgingly
when viscous doubts are like weights on us .

Every new beginning is a change in plans
that you're afraid to see
Endless worries fill your head,
"Who will I ever get to be?"

Every new beginning fades and blurs the present,
but it is never a new beginning without a change in me.

Whirling White Sand

by Haya Alkiswani

The wind whistles and the
White sand whirls and waves of
Water shimmer under
The saffron, setting sun.

The waves are warm and steady;
I float on salty water,
Surrendering to the waves,
Coming closer to the shore.

I succumb to the scratching pain
Of endless patches of pebbles;
I am now here where the white sand
Settles and then spins with the wind.

"Mom look, some slimy seaweed!" she says;
The sand shakes with the steps of a girl
Who tosses me back in the water
Where the waves swish and stir me to sleep.

THE SECRET JUNGLE BY ADRIANNE NEMCHIK

In the middle of a city,
So clean and pristine,
There is a jungle,
That lies within.

Hidden and obscure,
One may easily overlook it,
But its branches and vines grow
Faster than one may care to admit.

Who owns this jungle?
Where can it be found?
Well there is a simple answer to both,
Just look around.

Its roots lie deep
within the soil,
Its vines stretch high
Above and coil.

Not much room for sunlight,
Just a bit peeking through.
All that can be seen is verdant,
But what else is there?
I haven't got a clue.

WITH EVERY ENDING,
THERE IS SOMETHING NEW
Tzippora Applebaum
Midterm Exam, December

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Name: APRIL Date: _____

Erica walked down the street as her large bag of books knocked against her back with every step. The street was familiar to her as she had been down it more times than she could count. It still looked the same as it did years ago. Twelve trees evenly lined the street, six on each side of the block and seven houses stood on either side. It was a quiet block in a suburban neighborhood. Nothing really happened there except for the occasional teen trying to ride a motorcycle, which usually ended with a ride home in a police car or ambulance. Erica walked past a few children riding their bikes and up the walkway to a red brick house.

Upstairs, she entered the room that was almost as familiar as her own. Or had been. What was once a neat light blue room with white furniture filled with books, papers, pens, and half- finished puzzles was now a messy room filled with cheap looking posters of clothing designs, make-up strewn on the floor, hair accessories on the desk, and torn pieces of paper all over the place. In the corner of the room on an unmade bed sat April, hunched over a notebook, drawing what looked like a dress.

"Hi," said Erica, knocking on the door lightly.

"Hey," said April, not looking up from her drawing.

Erica sat down on the desk chair, moving aside the papers and make-up on it. She glanced at April waiting for her to say something, but she didn't even look up, too focused on her drawing.

Erica sighed, "so..." she began, "do you want to start studying for the test tomorrow. It's on ten different topics and it's a really big percentage of our grade."

"Nah, later," April replied.

"I know you haven't started studying yet, so I came over specifically to do that. We could do it together and get it done super quick."

"It's fine, really, I can do it later by myself." April said, not even bothering to glance up at Erica. I'm kind of busy here."

Erica rolled her eyes, staring at April's "busy work." She had now started on drawing the hem of the dress, giving it a jagged hemline.

"You sure? I came all this way and I have all the material with me."

"Yeah, I'm fine, "came the curt response.

Erica sighed again. Gathering her books, she stood up and walked out of the room, careful to avoid the make-up on the floor and endless piles of torn papers from magazines.

"Bye," she said at the door.

"Bye," April called absently.

Erica took one last glance at April. She was still hunched over on the bed in the messy room carefully drawing, in the same position she had been when she arrived. It was almost as if she hadn't come.

Outside, Erica walked down the street, lost in thought. April had been acting so strangely ever since winter break this year. It had all started after they had taken that big midterm exam. They had studied together for hours and hours and when test time came, Erica thought it had gone well, as she had confidently answered each of the questions. She had thought April had done well too, but she didn't have a chance to see her or ask her since then. Texting and calling didn't work since April never answered either one. When they had come back to school after vacation, it was like April was a different person. Her clothes were different, and it was like her whole personality had changed. She didn't seem to care about school anymore, instead only caring about drawing in that black notebook of hers. Her neat, studious, conscientious friend had turned into a stranger.

The next day during the test, Erica sat in her usual seat one row away from April. While Erica filled out the answers, she glanced over at April hoping she had studied. Instead of filling out the test, April was doodling on the page, connecting the words with pictures and scribbles. She could see only a few questions filled out and the rest of the page was blank. Erica looked away and continued her own test.

"Ok, time's up, hand in your tests," the teacher said.

Erica saw April quickly hand in her test and head out. She followed after her, running to catch up.

"Hey, April, wait."

April turned around, “What do you want?” she said annoyed.

“I saw that you were scribbling the whole time, you didn’t even fill out half the test, what’s wrong with you?”

“First of all, it wasn’t scribbling and why do you care so much? It wasn’t you doing it, was it?”

“I care because you’ve changed so much, you don’t care about school or anything anymore and won’t even talk to me or tell me why. Ever since winter break.”

Something passed over April’s face when she said those words. Her jaw clenched, her eyes widened, and a tinge of red came to her cheeks.

“Ever since break, I…, “she started,” then her eyes hardened and she said, “you know what, Erica, there’s more to life than tests and school and if you weren’t so obsessed with it, your entire life’s value would not be based only on it,” she retorted.

“I was only trying to be nice,” Erica said back.

April rolled her eyes and turned quickly, walking away. Erica stood there, watching her go, too upset to speak.

Later that day, Erica let herself in quietly to April’s house. She knocked softly on April’s bedroom door, looking carefully at April who was hunched over on her bed.

“Can I come in?” she asked softly.

“Yeah, sure, whatever,” she answered, not looking up.

Erica walked over the scattered papers and clothing and sat on the chair opposite the bed.

“I wanted to say I’m sorry for earlier today…” she began.

“Stop,” April said, “you don’t have to apologize for doing nothing.”

“I,” Erica said.

“Just stop,” April said,” and listen to me for a second.”

Erica closed her mouth and crossed her arms.

“I don’t study anymore, and I didn’t contact you since break because I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed because I failed all the midterms. I did study and I did try, and I know you tried to help me, but I just can’t anymore. I can’t study and fail and fail again. “

Erica stared at her, April’s voice had hitched, and she kept swiping at her face, holding back tears.

“I, I’m sorry,” Erica said, “you should have told me sooner, I can help you study, we can do it together.”

"No, stop trying to fix it, I already talked to my parents, and I've decided that there are other things to pursue besides school and academics. I don't have to follow something that doesn't suit me."

"But it could suit you if you wanted it to."

"But I don't want it to, and it doesn't. I know that there are other things out there for me. I like design and I'm going to try that for now."

Erica just looked at her. The friend who had been so similar to her now seemed so different. They had always studied together, and she thought she had liked school just as much as she had, but now that she thought back to it, she realized that April had always kept her scores a secret and had always struggled to understand the material.

"I'm sorry," April said, "but, you know, we can still be friends."

"I guess," Erica said, not making eye contact.

Erica left the room and headed out the front door. Outside, children rode by her on bikes and one boy drove by on a motorcycle. She glanced at the seven houses on either side of the street and at the twelve trees, all neatly lined up in even rows. Nothing outside had changed, but there was a change in her life. Even though she didn't understand how April could change so much, she could accept it. She could learn to let it go and when she did, she could learn to like the new April. After all, with every ending, there is something new.

The Local Cluster

Jason Wu

See also: Standard Model, Realities of the Local Cluster

The Standard Model is an all-encompassing framework of theories describing the nature of the Local Cluster, its laws and fundamental forces, and all known forms of matter that exist within it. It is built upon a collection of earlier standard models each created to describe the universes their makers inhabited, combining their collective knowledge to form a new framework consistent across the Local Cluster. Though it is internally consistent and accurately describes many of the known physical interactions present in the Local Cluster, it remains far from a unified theory that can describe everything making up the Local Cluster.

Interstitial Void

The Standard Model understands the Cluster as a collection of universes, each a "bubble" with their own slightly different set of laws of reality, separated by a poorly understood space scientifically known as the Interstitial Void but colloquially known as "the Sea".

The Void is believed to operate on more physical dimensions than the three that the various universes and their inhabitants are accustomed to. The precise number of additional dimensions is unknown. The Standard Model postulates that the Void, on top of its additional spatial dimension(s), operates on a set of laws entirely alien to those of the various universes. Determining the legitimacy of these postulations on the nature of the Sea is nearly impossible, however, due to the nature of itself and of the "material" occupying it.

Luminferous Ether

The Luminiferous Ether, a "particle" in the loosest sense of the word, is believed to uniformly occupy the Interstitial Void between realities and evenly fill it not unlike water occupying the space between islands on a sea. This analogy is partially responsible for the colloquial name of "the Sea", even though it is far more alien than any ocean of liquid known to either superpower. The exact nature of the Ether is a contentious matter, for it is as poorly understood as the Void it occupies. What little knowledge on its interaction with the assorted particles of reality is mostly derived from many failed attempts to observe some amount of the Ether in a "real" environment.

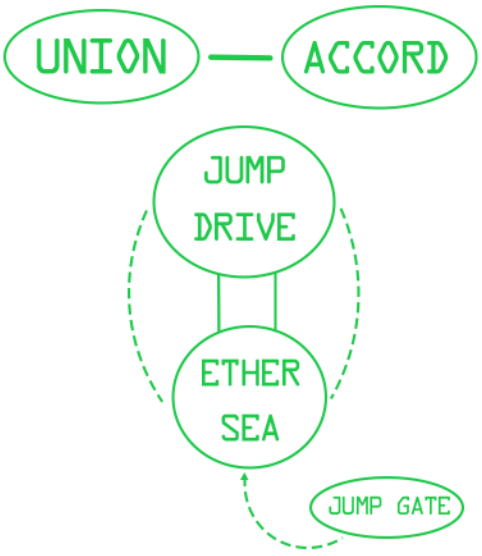
When introduced into a controlled setting within a known universe, usually through a controlled puncture of the veil of reality to create a temporary opening into the Void, the body of Ether that is introduced into reality immediately begins to break apart into smaller bodies. The "particles" of the Ether, entirely opaque to all electromagnetic observation in a manner akin to that of a black body, appear to be repelled away from any and all baryonic matter. Yet, at the same time, the Ether appears to exert a pulling force upon nearby baryonic matter. Both the repulsion and the attraction are positively correlated with the amount of the Ether and of baryonic matter but negatively correlated with the distance between the two masses. This reaction most resembles a reverse of the hypothetical reaction between positively and negatively massed matter; the Ether attracts baryonic matter to itself and simultaneously repulses itself from baryonic matter.

Some hypotheses claim a relation between the Ether and baryons similar to that between positive and negative mass matter, but these hypotheses have yet to be conclusively proven. It is believed that, if exposed to each other at larger quantities, the resulting physical interaction between Ether and baryons will cause a positively reinforced runaway motion with both accelerating indefinitely towards lightspeed.

Extended observation of the Ether or the theorized runaway motion has proven to be impossible, however, due to the final property of the Ether in reality: in defiance of multiple known laws of physics, the Ether will rapidly disappear from whatever container they are located within. The current understanding of this phenomenon as acknowledged by the Standard Model is that, as particles fundamentally suited for existing in the higher-dimensional Interstitial Void, the Ether slips through the universe it is contained in through these higher dimensions and back into the Void.

As of the writing of this entry, there is no empirically proven way to contain the Ether in a real setting for extended periods of time. Some theorize that a modified Jump Drive may be able to act in reverse and maintain a bubble of reality containing a body of Ether, however this has yet to be demonstrated through experimentation.

Jump Technology



The Jump Gate and the Jump Drive, twin technologies from the earliest days of the Sapient Explosion that allowed the Union and the Accord to exist, bypasses the issue of understanding the Ether Sea.

The Jump Drive creates a salient or "protrusion" of realspace into the Ether and then enters said salient, before pinching off the salient into a bubble and traveling through the Ether Sea in the relative safety of the bubble. During the passage through the Ether Sea, the Jump Drive constantly works to maintain the bubble's integrity and to chart a "course" through the Ether Sea to the desired destination. The method by which the Jump Drive charts and follows a course through the Ether Sea is poorly understood but is believed to involve a theorized attraction between bubbles of reality in the Ether in a manner similar to that of gravity. This theory is controversial due to the heavily contested nature of the evidence provided to support its validity; however, due to the lack of a more consistent explanation, it remains the most accepted theory on the nature of the Jump Drive.

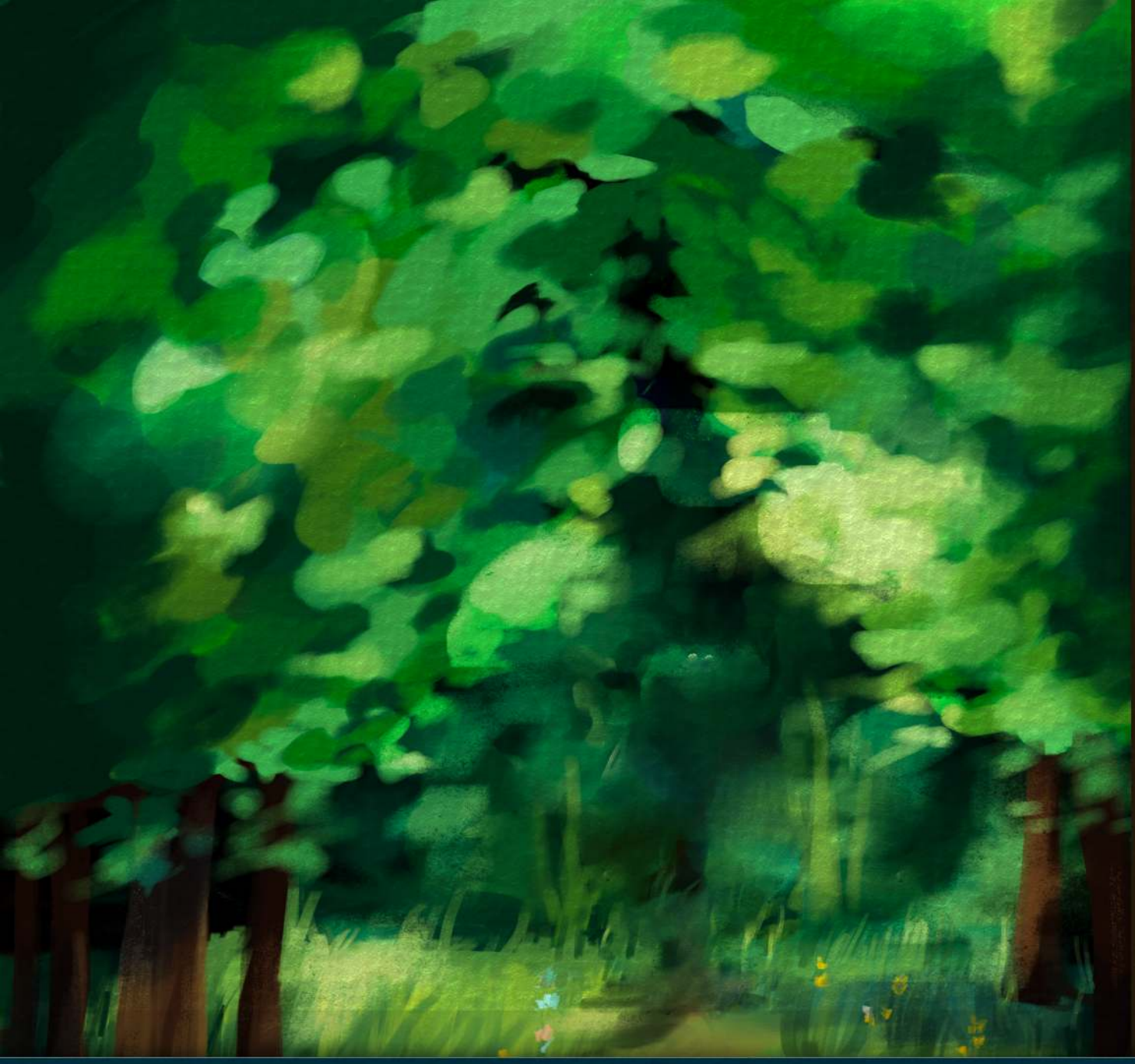
The Jump Gate projects a salient of reality, one much larger and more powerful than that of any Drive, into the Ether Sea in a manner not unlike an amoeba extending a pseudopod. When this salient intersects with a universe, the result is a one-way "tunnel" of reality flowing from the Jump Gate to the intersection. Such a tunnel allows objects to ride the flow of reality and travel from the Gate to the intersection point. The end of the salient widens the further it extends into the Ether Sea; because of this, objects traveling through a one-way Jump Gate will be scattered away from the "center" of the intersection point at a rate directly proportional to the "distance" between the home Gate and the intersection point.

Jump Gates usually operate in pairs with each Gate located on the ends of a desired two-way superluminal and transversal passageway. The paired Jump Gates project and merge their salients to create a much more stable

two-way bridge of reality connecting the two ends, allowing objects to traverse in either direction with effectively no scattering. Such tunnels are stable over long periods of time assuming proper maintenance of the Jump Gates in question.

Though such an event has never been observed before, some hypothesize that a failure to maintain a Gate-based salient will lead to the creation of a one-way funnel leading from the Jump Gate's home universe into the Ether Sea. The implications of such a funnel is unknown, as the Standard Model has yet to establish an accepted understanding of the interactions present in such a hypothetical event. No such event has occurred due to stringent regulations on the usage of Jump Gates.

Until next time



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