

VOYAGE XXXIV

WHAT DID YOU SAY THAT FOR?

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

"Psst. HEY!"
 "Hmm. Hey."
 "Do you wanna talk about it?"
 "Uhh, no. There's nothing to talk about 'here'."
 "I don't like it when you air quote. I hate your sarcasm."
 "I'm sorry there's no one here to *validate* that."
 "Shut up. I'm trying to think."
 "Haha. Don't you always?"
 "And you don't give a damn. I see what you do all day. Or night. Whatever."
 "I help. If it weren't for me, you'd have gone insane out here."
 "I'm pretty sure I've already gone insane. Thanks to you."
 "Pleasure. Where's the food? I'm kinda hungry."
 "There's none left."
 "Oh, crap. It's been days now. Do you think they even care about you?"
 "Do you?"
 "Real cheesy. I'm being serious!"
 "Uhh, I don't know. I don't think I can take this any longer."
 "Neither can I. It's getting difficult to breathe every second."
 "You should go now. I need some alone time."
 "What if they show up?"
 "They, who?"
 "You know..."
 "I don't, and I'd rather not anyway."
 "I guess it's all in my head then."
 "Nice one there."
 "I think I'm losing it. This isn't what I volunteered for."
 "Me neither."

BUZZ-CLICK-BUZZZ

"Minsk to Kepler 27... Minsk to Kepler 27... Do you copy?"
 "Kepler 27. Copy."
 "Thank God, we finally got to you. Are you okay? Wait, hold on. Okay?"
 "Holding on."

THIS COFFEE IS AMAZING

RUMMAN R KALAM

"THIS COFFEE IS AMAZING," screamed Goblrdoorf.
 "THIS COFFEE GETS MORE AMAZING," Tebbref screamed back.
 Both Uranasians stuck their heads into their coffee buckets, absorbing the dark and bitter brew.
 Goblrdoorf took his antennae out just enough for him to stick them into Tebbref's ears.
 "This coffee, is uh-maze-ing," he whispered, and with that, he took his head out of the bucket and passed out.
 Goblrdoorf took his head out as well and screamed into Tebbref's ears, "THIS COFFEE IS FREAKIN' AMAZING, YOU MUFFLEGRUBER."
 Tebbref didn't move.

A PIECE OF MY MIND

ZOHEB MASHIUR

Centuries before the development of the first teleporter, writers had identified some of the major issues with matter transference technology. When objects are analysed and itemised down to the last molecule, blasted into nothing and reassembled at the destination there is always the danger that something will be 'lost in the mail'; particularly frightening when the object in transit is yourself.

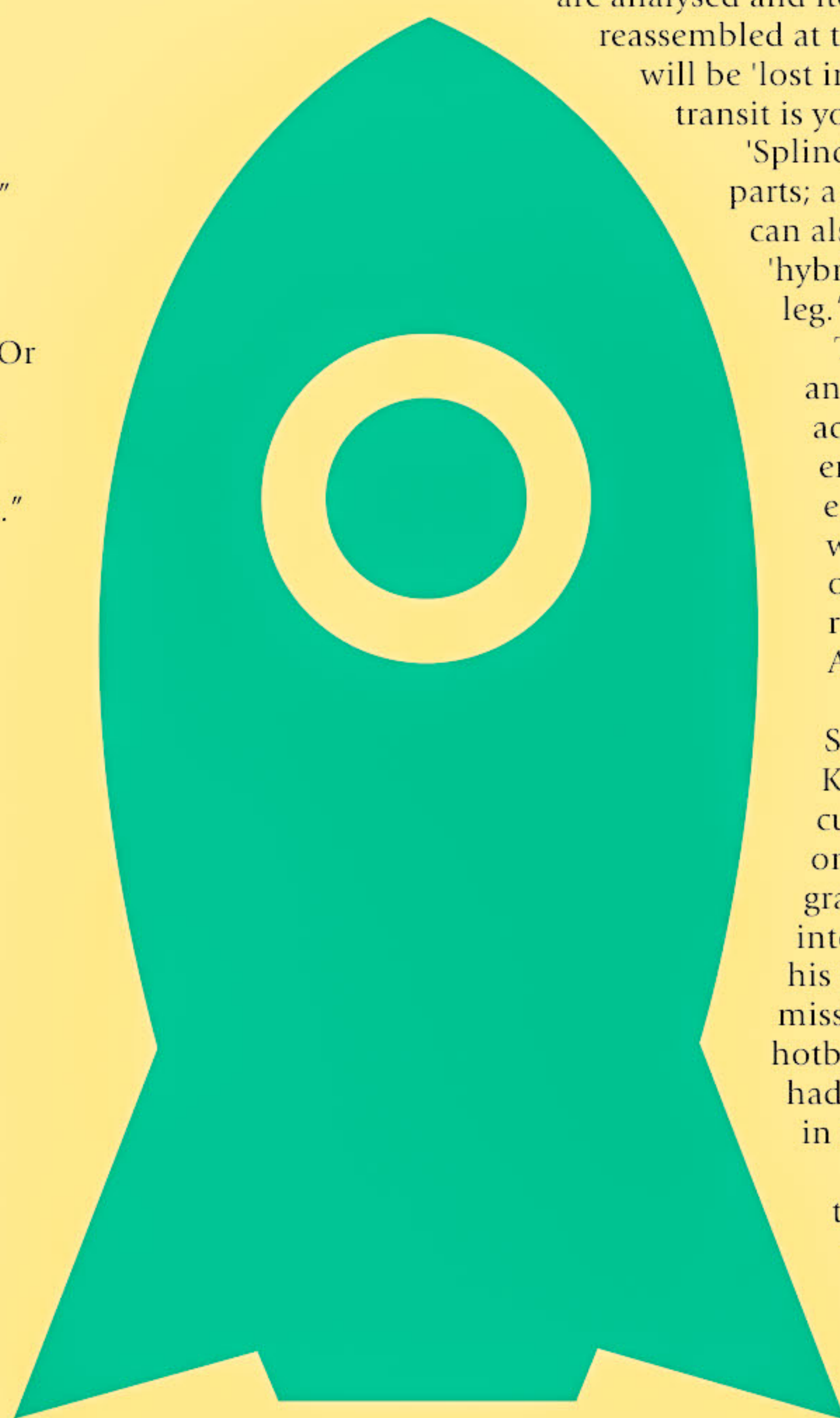
'Splinching' is the colloquial term for this permanent loss of body parts; a reference to *Harry Potter*. Splinching during bulk transfers can also lead to data packets cross-contaminating and producing 'hybrid output' – legalese for "you'll arrive with your father's leg." The Official™ term is 'desyncing'.

Teleporters were developed during the First Systems War by an Earth government desperate to move men and materiel across besieged planets quickly. By the time the technology entered into civilian use, splinching had largely been eradicated (though many veterans can be seen walking about with eyes of two different colours). In the past five decades only 624 cases of splinching (Galactic total) have been report. Of these the most remarkable was perhaps that of Mr. Abdur Galen Rahman.

The fifty year-old Jovian widower was teleporting from Station 311 on Jupiter to visit his son on the Edgeworth-Kuiper Belt. Upon arrival at the Hi'iaka Transit Zone, customs discovered he weighed 465 grams less than he had on Jupiter. Panicked body exams identified that 458 of these grams had been Mr. Rahman's left kidney, his lunch and some internal fluids. Mr. Rahman threatened to sue for the loss of his kidney, and customs were determined to account for the missing 7 grams. Then as now the frontier was a separatist hotbed and it was feared Mr. Rahman was a rebel operative who had tried (and failed) to smuggle in some sort of bio-weapon in his body.

It was a keen-eyed medical intern who noticed the residual tissue and solved the riddle. Mr. Rahman had an undiagnosed brain tumour which had been splinched almost in its entirety. This was the first recorded incidence of teleporter surgery, and inspired the incorporation of matter transference techniques in medicine.

Excerpted from T. Kandinsky's "How We Moved Forward".



THE HUNT

KARIM WAHEED

She was shuffling as fast as she could; the wind felt strange on her wet, hirsute face. She was afraid of the dark, like everyone else she knew. The clan never went out after light outside had died. She was in charge of looking after their own light—the most precious possession in their cave. The flickering ember would morph into a blinding flame when she fed it. Darkness was not their friend. Those taken away at night never returned; her mother didn't.

She had seen the hunters once, the night her mother was taken. Strange, mostly hairless, gracile creatures. In the dark, they could be mistaken for her

people but they were nothing alike. They were towering, slender and stood upright like the trees—bits of which her people fed to the light inside the cave, except trees never moved and the hunters moved fast. They always caught up.

No one knew where the hunters came from but the elders speak of colossal birds that fell from the sky. They were the ones who started the hunt, eons ago and they *only* took the women with them. No one has seen these birds; only the story remains. The elders say the birds created the hunters to do their bidding.

She can hear the hunters closing in and the erratic thuds of the shafts they carry and use to hurt her people. She can smell their distinct odour. She can only see darkness, as she won't look back.