

Futures

The girl who used to be my sister

A voyage of self-discovery. **By Sylvia Spruck Wrigley**

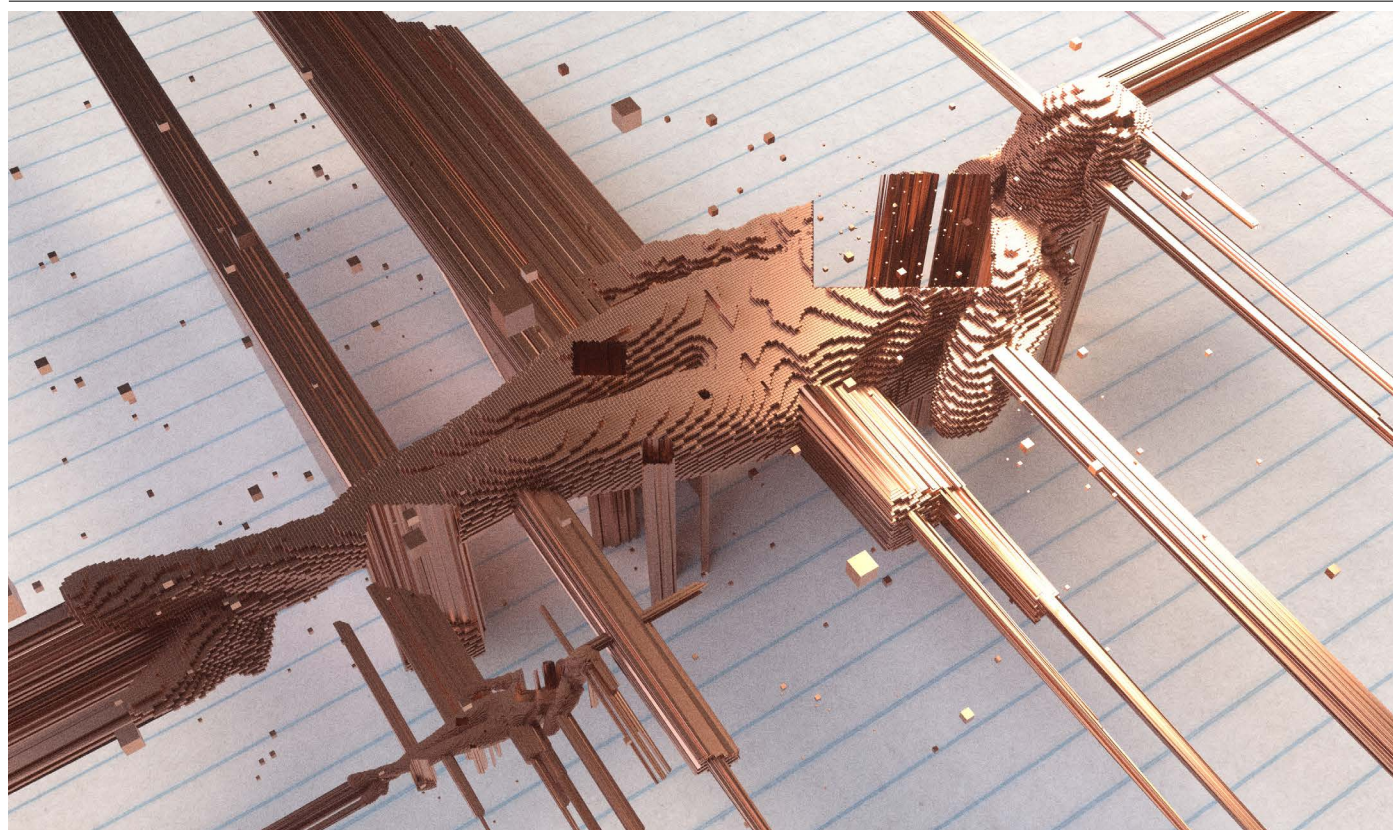


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

My grandparents used to tell stories about the old days, when there was only one chain and everyone lived on it. How much better it all was, then. I don't know if I believe the stories. How else did all the different languages start, all the religions? Where did cross-chain travel come from? But I like to remember their stories. Especially now.

I was born on Stokeham, a legacy chain. Good uptime. Low latency. Stable. A bit boring, I guess. That's what my sister always said. Vridia. She called Stokeham a Boomer Chain, using grandma-slang to show just how backwater we were. Before she stopped talking to me.

Everyone is born to a parachain, which defines your language, social customs, legal frameworks, dating protocols. Some people fork themselves to try to spread across multiple chains, hoping to optimize different traits. But the more chains you use, the more fragmented you become. That's what I think

happened to Vridia.

I didn't tell anyone when she stopped syncing. I figured she was just experimenting, you know? Showing off. She was always a bit of a drama queen.

Then Mum caught her at the relay, trying to pass as old enough for cross-chain travel.

I guess she convinced someone, because she's gone now. Been gone for a while. Our last successful connect ended mid-sentence. After that: silence.

Sometimes, I forget why I started. The systems do that: strip your memories for better performance, perfectly optimized for the here and now. Vridia might not understand why I'm there, standing in front of her. She might not even recognize me. The more chains you use, the more fragmented you become.

My identity pass says I'm on a pilgrimage; that I'm exploring chains on a voyage of self-discovery. But that's not the truth. The truth is that I'm trying to find Vridia.

I don't store memories in-system any more. Too risky. Some chains overwrite. Others archive everything and charge you to forget. Safer not to.

There are problems with not syncing, of course. I've started finding signs that I'm fragmenting. Small everyday things just seem a little off. Recognizing places that I know I've never been to before. Memories rendered wrong; not how I remember. And last week, a stranger walked up to me and called me by my sister's name. We don't even look alike. She's beautiful and confident and wild. I'm just ... me.

I think I might have met myself once, or at least someone who thought she was me. She told me that I'd re-synced too many times, that my memories of my sister were just an integrity mismatch.

I think she tried to delete me.

Of course, I am taking precautions. I have analog back-ups in a notebook that granddad gave me. Ink never forks. That's what he always

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said. Vridia told me the same.

But I don't know if I can do this. The relays were never meant to reunite anyone: they were built for bridging, to keep us moving. How long before I forget what I'm doing here?

A registry scan flagged me for "possible fork of existing user". I told the relay guard that that was impossible. He just looked at me like someone who'd seen too many travellers returning as the wrong person.

I might be fragmenting. I might have lost

a page from my notebook. I can't find what I wrote about my search for my sister.

Ink is safe. Grandad told me that. *Ink can't fork*. But I keep trying to find the words that I remember in the notebook and now I'm not sure that that's right. The handwriting is familiar but it says I'm on a voyage of self-discovery. That's not the truth.

The cover says "Property of Vridia" in faded ink. But how can my sister have my notebook?

Sometimes I forget why I started. The more

chains you use, the more fragmented you become.

Sylvia Spruck Wrigley is a Nebula-nominated speculative fiction author and independent researcher exploring representations of old age in science fiction. Her work has been translated into more than a dozen languages. She has had a crush on James T. Kirk since the age of 11. You can find out more about her at <https://intrigue.co.uk>.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Sylvia Spruck Wrigley reveals the inspiration behind *The girl who used to be my sister*.

This story began at a 48-hour software sprint in Belgrade, where I sat in a crowd of bright and passionate developers as a stunt writer, drafting short stories instead of code. I challenged myself to produce at least one story during the event.

The creative pressure of being surrounded by coders while attempting something completely different sparked an unexpected burst of fiction writing. By the end of the sprint, I'd written five drafts in a haze of sleep deprivation and buffet croissants, including a break-up letter disguised as software, and a parody of the guy who thinks wiping the whiteboard counts as contributing to the team. They were funny, they were strange, they were definitely not apps.

At the end, I had to present my 'project' to the judges. It... did not go well. Let's just say the judges weren't expecting a dramatic reading.

But one draft stuck with me: *The girl who used to be my sister*. When I got home, I tore it apart and put it back together and it became this piece.

I've written about the whole chaotic weekend on my newsletter, *Accidents and Incidents: No One Stopped Me* (see go.nature.com/430ppzs).

