[Harper] You’re going to make a local jump? Have you lost your mind?

[Kaas] You know our cargo won’t clear customs. What did you think would happen?

H: I don’t know, I thought you’d have some plan for smuggling it over the border conventionally or something.

Harper was new to the whole thieving business, and was surprised each time another illegal act was required to keep the play alive.

K: Dude you watch too many old vids. This ain’t the kind of deal where you hide in plain sight, make the drop then drive off into the sunset with no-one the wiser. This is glow we’re talking about. It’s \_on\_. 24x7. Even shielded.

H: Frack. I know what it is, but a local jump? Isn’t that even more detectable than our cargo?

K: Only on re-emergence. In the open.

H: Right, as soon as we jump back in we might as well turn on a homing beacon, light flares and broadcast “Come and get … uh, what do you mean by ‘in the open’.

K: If your jump return locus is in the open you will be seen by dozens of eyes in seconds. Thus ours is not in the open.

H: Huh? Wait – what airspace is not ‘in the open’? The whole planet is covered by eyes.

K: Airspace eyes don’t penetrate nothing but atmosphere and clouds. Anything solid bounces ‘em right back up.

H: I don’t like where this is going. Do you mean to tell me you plan to jump to a concealed location – as in re-emerging under something? As if a local jump isn’t madness enough, now we need millimeter precision or else we mix atoms with roof tiles?

K: Now you’re getting it. And it’s not ‘under something.’ More like ‘inside.’

H: What the frack – there’s no margin for error. Inertial drift in the transient dimension always puts the error distance into meters or tens of meters. Where are you going to re-emerge indoors with that kind of clearance? A football stadium?

K: There’s a thought. And if I pick the right night when there’s a concert, the audience will think we are part of the show. Damn Harper I had you pegged as the non-crafty type.

H: Ha-ha. Friggin wiseguy.

K: Besides, there some other cargo to help with the margin of error.

H: Do I want to know?

Local jumps are direct hops from one surface location to another, without any layover or routing through local space. Colloquially the term had also become to mean that your target location was not an official jump site, implying that you were engaged in activity that you preferred remained unseen. Sanctioned jumps by private craft involved 2 hops, one from the port of origin to a location in orbit, then a second down to an approved jump site.

True local jumps were reserved for commercial transports and government officials. Local lines were always crowded and thus heavily managed – ships required confirmation that the re-emergence site was already clear before making the first jump. Once you are ‘over there’ you cannot communicate again, at least not directly. You can send back a probe, but there is always the time interval from the probe’s return to your arrival when things can go sideways. The real jump back is always blind, so the re-emergence site had better be clear.

Accidents are not pretty – the atoms of the two ships wind up permanently comingled. Survivors of such accidents are rare. Occasionally both ships had a void in the same spot, and anyone lucky enough to be there might survive. The most recent example was the collision – or perhaps more accurately ‘merger’ – of a starliner and a freighter, mercifully both running skeleton crews. All survivors were in the galley of the starliner when they merged. The corresponding section of the freighter was its forward hold, which had not yet been loaded. All ten crew members in the galley survived, nine fully intact. The tenth was unlucky enough to be at the bulkhead near the galley exit, which was overlaid with a section of freighter hull that was sloping upward. The freighter hull came up to her shins, entombing her feet and lower legs in steel. The other nine say her scream was unlinke any other sound they’d ever heard from a human. The blood coursing down her legs suddenly had nowhere to go, and no route of return. The buildup and resulting swelling is instantly debilitating.

Crews are trained for merge accidents, but thankfully most never have to put it into practice. Immediate sedation, amputation and tourniquets are the only hope for survival. The starliner’s galley was equipped with an emergency kit, and they had her under in less than a minute. She survived, and unless she is wearing sandals you would never know she has two prosthetic feet. Most involved in merge accidents are not so lucky – if the chest cavity or head is entombed there is nothing that current medicine can do. Medical kits include cyanide capsules and injections for these scenarios.

Despite the risks nobody wants to stop making jumps. It would be like going back to the stone age, or earlier. Prior to jumps the process of moving from point A to point B hadn’t fundamentally changed in millenia. Significant milestones beyond foot travel included horseback, then much later railroads, then following quickly cars, airplanes and finally rockets. That’s it – about five modes of enhanced travel in our entire history as a species. Each was a momentous achievement in its time, yet when viewed against the larger picture each only provided an incremental improvement over its predessor. Our biggest leap was about a 10x leap forward versus the predecessor. Not so with jumps.

Jumping opened up the galaxy. Jumping allowed the traversal of light years without breaking any laws of physics. Jumping held the promise of exploration, finding other habitable worlds. People began to think that the oasis of our solar system need not be forever isolated from others. Jumping changed how we viewed the universe and our place in it.

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The jump dimensions were limitless in number as far as we could tell. A handful were regulated by each country for their official purposes, but the vast majority were the wild west. Piracy saw a resurgance in some of the outlier dimensions, most notably those with attributes that rendered them ill-suited for [fast straight line travel].

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(police person watching the jumps, notices an energy anomaly. It’s kaas and harper jumping. Nothing else is visible.)