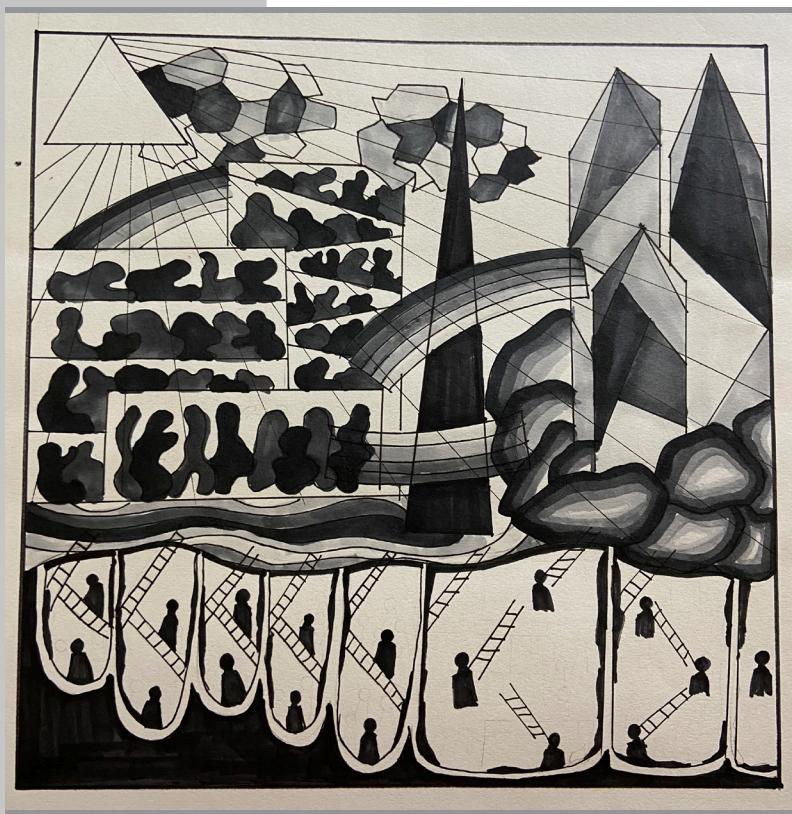


TEST DRAFT



INTEGRATIVE SEMINAR
Ashlesha Desai FYS G

1. Down the Ladder



Is this your first time in Metamia? You're going to need some help going around this place. I'll give you a little bit of history. I can't disclose our coordinates, of course. If you've landed here you've been dreaming in your planet for too long. If you do like this trial, your people will realize it soon and give you permanent residence!

I've been here for a while now. They told me I should opt for this since I might be seeing the last of my days. So, I agreed. Didn't even use the trial. But lucky for you, you have the time to make up your mind! Let me show you around.

Anyone visiting Metamia for the first time would probably think they were in a hallucination. I heard people call it a 'recycle bin'. A more preferred terminology would be a living grave. This place is designed specifically for the afterlife, where people lucky enough come to live (or die) in peace. The only people eligible for it are those with a hidden mark on their body, invisible to the naked eye. Called the Mark of Uta, it represents the sigil of the race dominating the land before the Metamia system began.

You're currently in the middle of the capital, Rhetorica. This was one of the first settlements here which could bloom into a city. Thus, you can tell it's very crowded. You can spot shiny glass reflecting back at you as far as the eye can see. These are the living quarters of the people. When one comes to Rhetorica for the first time, he is already allotted with a living quarter in one of these glass-panelled structures. The bigger these glass houses get, the bigger are the basements hidden underneath. On your left, the huge sack-like building is the bank. Employees here deal in hours, minutes and seconds. The result is reflected on a person's forearm, where an analogue clock with roman numerals ticks away, slowly, painfully. Sometimes it ticks too fast, and sometimes it trickles, like the narrow streams branching out of a wide blue river.

See that family walking by the water fountain? They're from completely different planets. Added into the system young, without a trial. We consider ourselves pretty cosmopolitan here. Rhetorica is a city forever like spring, with pink cherry blossoms blowing their petals gently in the breeze, only to lazily slide down glass panes. Rhetorica is a fragile young girl, about to fall apart after the loss of a lover. Rhetorica is a student with no answers. The glass will only withstand pressure for so long.

The most influential citizens of Rhetorica are immortal. No one can touch them. But it's often their own doing which leads to them drowning in debt, as high as hundreds of years. And yet, the ones who prevail live in their high castles, glimmering like diamonds under the sun. The locals often call this wealthy area of town the Slippery Slope drive. I like the name. An invisible demarcation exists between those who reside here and people like us. You cannot see a dotted line, but can certainly feel it just by looking at the residents. A large central crystal tower with a tip sharp enough to impale a creature glows steadily in the morning light, surrounded by the huge castle complexes that make up the community. Each street is well calculated, paying attention to how people could reach their destination in the shortest time possible. There are sharp 90 degree turns, and the entire area looks like a grid with equally sized squares occupying the same distance away from each other.

There's always a yin and yang. Right between the glass panes and glass castles, we have the most dominant population, the rabbit holes. They aren't seen unless you look for them, neither are their houses. These pothole-like structures are littered randomly across the entire city, blue and black covers now rusted a dull maroon. You must look where you're walking, to avoid the danger of tripping and falling directly into one. These are the only structures in the city that aren't made of glass, and this difference in the material creates a separation far graver than just two different surfaces. These potholes barely fit two people, let alone an entire family. Yet people manage. They live in a crowded network under the city, already half-dead from each other's proximity and the lack of hygiene. But they function just as well as the top half of the city, if not better. It is because they are carefree. They are the corpses no one wanted, and the ones having no family behind them. They have no responsibility, no memories, and could care less about the time on their arm. And this is how Rhetorica functions. It is not one city, but two halves of a whole, two sides of a coin.

2.OCD

If Rhetorica was the heart, then Nalogi is the backbone. You might've noticed how we're slightly further from the mainland. Nalogi is the most secretive city I know. Of course, there are government offices in every city, but Nalogi is the mother of all these departments. It controls all the cities. It controls everyone.

Back when this current system still hadn't formed, there was no scheme of political hierarchy on this land. There were small groups, communities, formed according to planetary origin and occupation. That is when a group of Uta, a small community who'd been original occupants of this planet as long as one could remember, decided it was time to take things in control. No one has ever seen them, but I like to imagine them as people with a swollen skull, greyish brown skin and a protruded mouth with sharp canines inside. It is said that they were pretty tall, almost 8 feet in height, and looked reptilian. Sometimes I look at the people living on this planet around me, the kind of... variety of features everyone has. And then I simply regret being born as a human on Earth. I mean think of the possibilities! Gills, fins, talons, wings, paws, tentacles, I could

Anyway, these creatures were the core group that led to the proper establishment of our land. And they decided that the currency that runs this place must be time. Paper currency was something tangible, something you could hold, something you could store away for the future. But not time. Time is the trickling water from a tap. It takes its course, whether I like it or not. I can't hold it, I can't stash it away, and I definitely cannot stop it. After the currency was set, they needed to put in position a system by which time could at least be made slightly tangible. That's where the sleeve chips come in. The technology takes advantage of your unconsciousness during your journey here, and a chip is inserted through your wrist into your right forearm. The currency from your previous planet is converted into hours, and that's the time you're set with on your first day in Metamia.

Nalogi was always a strict lockdown kind of place. The gigantic barbed wall guarding it is only a small physical barrier, the entire place is surrounded by a powerful force field which can fry people to a crisp within nanoseconds. So, we're here, looking at its large central dome beyond the Wall, simply strangers from the outside. No one comes out of Nalogi, and no one enters. The grey domes are probably filled with screens, with workers tracking everyone. Some domes are living premises, as seen by the small decorations put on the geometric panels, but other larger domes are all high security government offices.

The Government came up with the idea of a personalised simulated sky to help people keep track of how much time they're using. Here time works in two ways, it keeps ticking literally (much slower than Planet Earth, thankfully) and it can be added and deducted in terms of your life span. Phrases like 'giving you my time', 'waste my time' and 'spending time' become all too literal here. On earth, we didn't spend our cash on planning what to do with the cash we got later. Then why do we spend all our time planning out the future, instead of cherishing the present?

3.A Clean Cut

A breath of clean, fresh air. White sheets. Blue skies. That's how I'll always remember Llegorax. When you first arrive here, clean, white gates greet you. I can smell the antiseptic in the air. You can't enter the city without stepping into the Bac Capsule first. This capsule-shaped cabin scans your entire body, and kills 100% of the germs present. This is because the air in Llegorax is sterile.

Do you like our outfits? Pretty cool I know. These white robes are made from the most high-quality linen, extracted from the lush flax fields just outside the city compound. The people in this city have a simple agenda, everybody comes here to heal or be healed. Its inhabitants believe that the land itself has healing powers, and legend says that ancestors would rub the soil on wounds and gashes, and it would stitch itself back together. But this is the Llegorax of the past. Each time you enter the city with a health problem, it has ten new ways to cure it. The people figured out a way to extract the healing extract from the soil, and distilled it to its most potent capacity. This essence is now the life of the city, both literally and figuratively.

Several people come to the city in search of this cure. Though no one could escape with the formula alive, everyone who enters the city with an ailment goes back completely cured. The treatments are performed free of charge too, as the inhabitants believe it is the only way of giving back to their own land.

Llegorax has a central rectangular building towering above the rest. This white one above us. I think it's for their most complex cases. Around you, the structures arranged in circular fashion are the regular buildings. These are all shaped like a cross. Between these buildings, are a few smaller rectangular structures, shaped like a box. These are meant to resemble the ECG device in design, with the wavelength for the heart beat shown on the monitor. But instead of a single person's data, these usually show the natality and mortality occurred in that particular building. These buildings usually cater to emergency cases.

Beyond the central hospital area, is a series of semi-circle shaped buildings. This is the diagnosis complex. I'd been here once with a headache that felt like knives stabbing into my right eyebrow. They barely took 5 minutes, gave me a test tube with viscous violet liquid, and put me to sleep for a few hours. The moment I woke up, I was back in my room, as if the headache never existed.

A few miles away from here is a frightening sight. I can't take you there, but I can very well describe it. The sound of liquid gurgling over rocks is the first thing you will hear. It's confusing because instead of the usual smell of wet soil, a metallic tang seems to fill the air. Almost like biting the inside of the cheek too hard in a moment of anxiety.

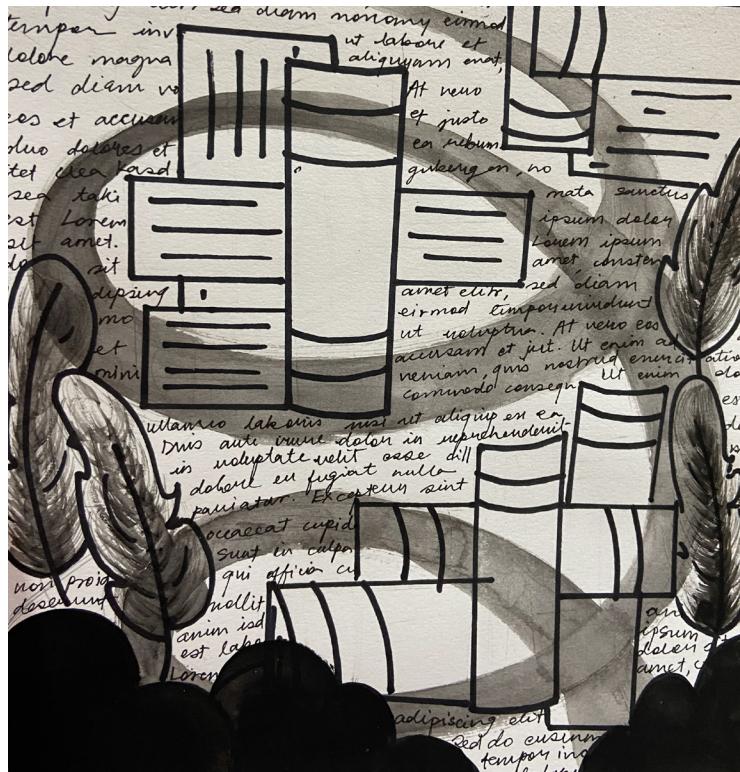
As you remember, the metallic taste, it becomes pretty clear why. Here flows the Bloodline, with strong currents splashing against the rocks. This is probably one of the most peculiar parts of the city. The river flows in distinct different shades, looking like paint stripes dragged by a paintbrush. As for the part with human blood, it can be extracted according to blood type based on chemicals put inside the vial before extraction. But no one knows where the Bloodline originates.



4. A Degree of Freedom

When one walks into a city, one sees its entirety in only a few minutes. There is a lot that can be understood about a place if we just stand and observe for a while. I look around a place and can see an old man heaving his fishnet, looking like a creeper spreading its tendrils across the sea. I can see the woman on the street begging for wares, the clock on her arm ever so close to midnight, and the magnetic buzz of a wagon moving past her, defying time and space itself. I know already that this place is a majorly trading city, with different communities inhabiting it. But this is not true about Translatio.

Translatio was made for one purpose only, to educate. And so, students of all ages, planets and communities are sent to this city. Schools are chosen according to the time etched in the student's skin. A lower number would usually mean the child is taught only the basics, while more time would mean higher qualifications and whatnot. What does one get after being qualified on your planet? Degrees is it? Here we believe in a system of 'pieces'. Successful completion of a course will give the student a single 'piece' of cold black metal. Although it looks ordinary, it contains records of all the tests, and performance of the pupil, along with surveillance of classroom behaviour. Then as he/she progresses, every course would mean another piece. If the student is qualified enough, the pieces are put together to make a document, containing an AI system which tells what the student is eligible for.



Almost every building here looks like a stack of books. The higher the stack is, the more the number of courses taught in the institution. The rabbit hole citizens would usually go to the minimum 4 stack schools, the middle-class students range from 6-stack to 8-stack buildings, while the elite chooses nothing below a 10-rack school. The walls are literal paper, and quill trees grow on the inky soil. Even with all this technology, they insist on using ink on paper. Only two liquids flow from the taps, coffee or ink. Sometimes a steady stream of red flows down the drain.

I went to 7-Stack B5 from the moment I landed here. Having an interplanetary classroom accounts for a lot of chaos. People are made to sign a legal death

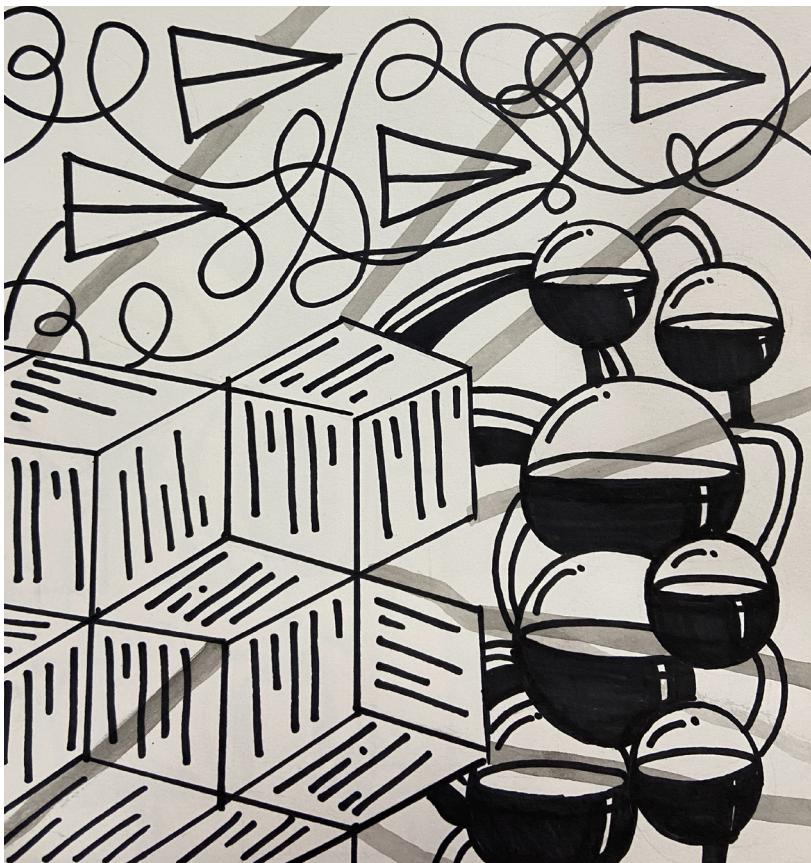
responsibility form before they ship off their child here. In the 5-12 years that a pupil will spend here, there is no guarantee of what he will face, or what kind of strange creatures he will meet. But they have to be mentally prepared to ring the child's death knell. The higher the stack, the better the distance to jump down from. The city almost felt like a prison to me sometimes. It's so fast. Everyone seems like they know more than you. But it's not all bad. Coming here, I've learnt so much from all the friends I've made. Being from different worlds, we've been exposed to so many different species and their cultures. Some of the students I met on my first day of 7-Stack B5 are now like family to me. I give Translatio full credit for that.

5.A Ripple Of Grief

Brine filled black soil, vapour hanging low in the air and pipes. That's how I would describe Similotan in three words. The geography of this place is mind-boggling. The city is triangular in shape, and two of its three sides are surrounded by water. We call this water body the 'Sea of Grief'. I think it's because this part of the city is made to look grey forever, as part of the sky simulation. This is the main water body which provides for most of the land's aquatic needs. Similotan looks like a huge misaligned chessboard for the most part- the huge white blocks, i.e. the tanks, and the black fertile soil below.

Have you ever had a spoon full of crystallized sugar? It almost gets sickly sweet. That's how water from the Sea of Grief tastes. One drop of this would make a diabetic patient in Llegorax Tower 5 hyperglycaemic instantly. The entire process of making the water drinkable involves getting rid of sweetness.

This first wide pipe arching above everything else is the most important one. This has vacuum strong enough to suck several gallons of the thick syrupy water from the Sea all at once. The worker you see standing next to it is probably the one who needs replacements most often. As you walk toward the shore, the first row of tanks is seen. These ones filter solid impurities. Can you hear the low rumbling sound? That's all the large sugar crystals and soil hurtling through the drainage pipe. Further ahead, the water flows into the radiation tanks. These are larger than their surrounding tanks, made with thick layers of cement and encased with lead-like metal to prevent any radiation from escaping. The water is zapped with radiations of different frequencies, killing any bacteria or microbes. This set of workers would probably be the second-most frequently replaced.

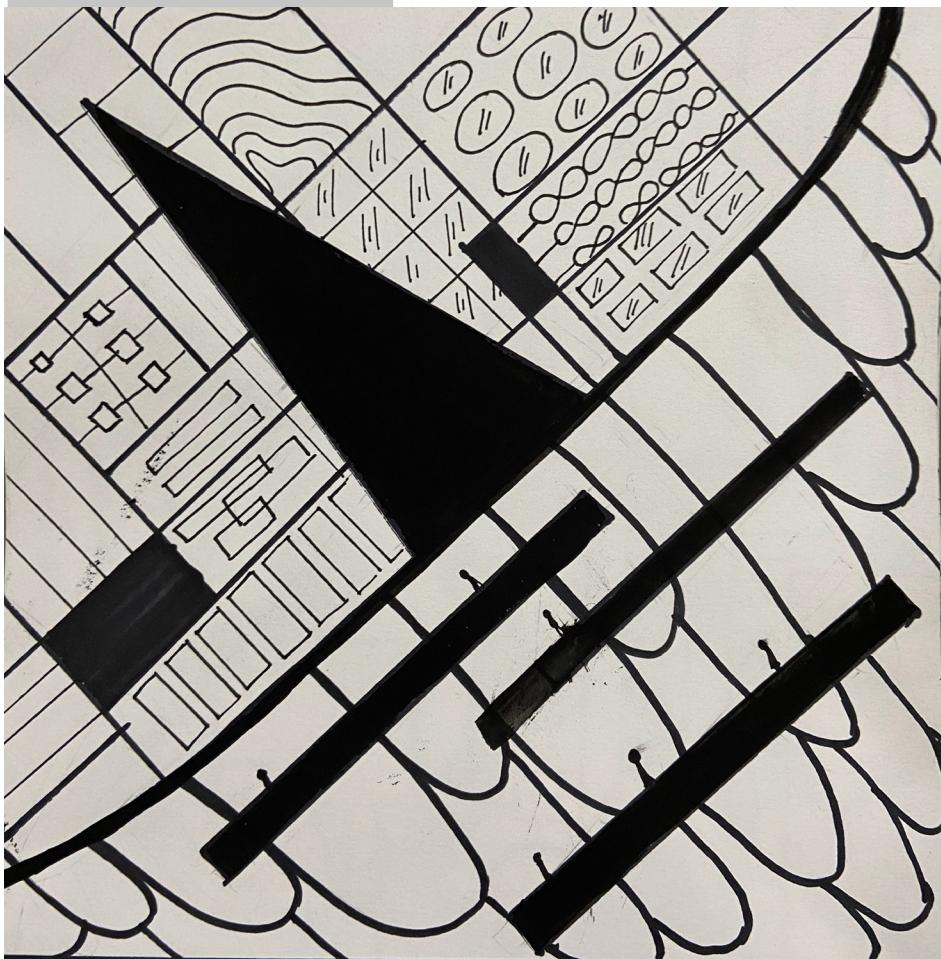


The last line of defence is the crystallizing tanks situated at the very end of the city. The tanks are heated to boiling temperatures and then allowed to rapidly cool, crystallizing shards of sucrose. After they extract these, they go to the two post processing tanks on the right, which improve the taste and neutralise any remaining sweetness.

Of course, this sounds really simple to explain, but 90% of Similotan works for the water plant. As the pipelines go on connecting one white block to another, it is the tendrils of a growing grapevine, involving the entire city in the water-plant hierarchy.

Similians have been in the water business for ages. There's always someone being zapped, falling in scalding hot tanks, or being vacuumed. So fresh replacements are always coming in through connections, relations, and acquaintances. This is the city with minimum literacy since none of the families send their children away for education. And why would they? If they have jobs laid down for the child already, why does the child need to study? Why does the child need to have an opinion on what his/her future would look like? Only Similians can answer that.

6. Not in Front of The Kids!



If throwing around confetti on a birthday could turn into a city, it would be Nificati. And thus, the loving nickname Confetti Town. This place is literally the life of the party. Anything extravagant, anything social, anything fun, you're looking at Confetti town. The government's been kind enough to keep this place having a perpetual golden sunset, and a cool ocean breeze. People from the glass castles in Rhetorica to the stacked books of Translatio teleport all the way here to have a good time.

I love the ambience and warmth that the city gives. It welcomes everyone with open arms (literally, there are metallic open arms at the main gate of the city, as you can see). The city has floating fairies hired all the way from Neverland (which is obviously real, second star to the right and straight on till morning) specially to fly around with their tiny lit up bodies and make it look like floating literal fairy lights. Everyone works in shifts at Nificati, because the place never shuts down. Even with all the fun and thrill it gives, it probably has the lowest crime rate. I think it's probably because everyone is too dazed to commit a crime anyway.

It is here that people usually come searching for a mate. The hottest match-making destination in the city. Like I mentioned, this is a cosmopolitan place. There are no rules to which two species could be together. But yes, if a pair decides to commit, they usually head to the genetic engineer's office (located right in Nificati, of course) to see if their genes are compatible. If not, then the couple usually adopts, and that's how families are formed.

Nificati is known for its abundant supply of psychedelics. They're powerful enough to make you assume you're back on your home planet, doing human things. Maybe that's why they're so popular.

People often go into a trance in search of something, hoping to find a place, an emotion, or a dream. These are found in herbs growing in clumps around the outskirts of Nificati. They affect the cardiovascular and nervous system of creatures, but more interestingly, it mimics the slowing down of time. Isn't that what everyone wants? For the entire world to simply wait for them to catch up.

The city is littered with white tents, containing soft cushions to sit on. These tents, just like the city's inhabitants, are temporary. The only thing permanent about Nificati are little fingers. Fingers small enough to scrape at the soil to pull out the herbs in the silence of the night. Fingers delicate enough to handle the herbs with care, and tightly roll them up to ship them across the land. Hands large enough to just fit in metal jewellery, clanging as the chains sway past. Nificati is musical, unpredictable, and liberating. An immortal fun fair.