

PLANET EXPRESS



ENGLISH EDITION

AI

SCI-FI

PHYSICS

BIOLOGY

RADIO

ANALOG

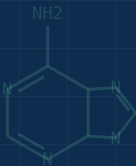
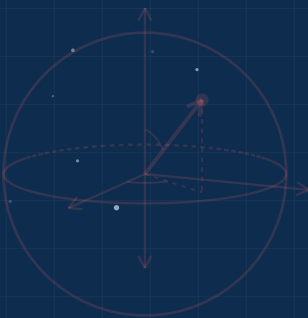
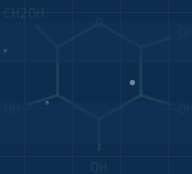
HEALTH

LIFE

HUMOR

Contents

NO.	TITLE	PAGE
01	FABLE & MYTHOS	02
02	THE CULTURE	03
03	THE ORBITAL	04
04	QUANTUM HUMBUG	05
05	HACKABLE BIOLOGY	06
06	THE WOMAN WHO STILL LIVES TODAY	07-09
07	(NO) MESH FOR ALL CASES	10
08	ON PAPER	11
09	MOVE YOUR BODY	12
10	LOVE FOR LONELY HACKERS	13
11	JOKES	14



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

FABLE & MYTHOS

// THE SHITSHOW

For weeks Anthropic has been in our ear about how terribly dangerous their Mythos model supposedly is. Yada yada. If you've watched what AI is doing to software development, it shouldn't surprise you that current models turn up holes in software and infrastructure without breaking a sweat. Open source maintainers have been feeling it hard for a while now.

Mythos, though, is supposedly far too hot for the rabble, so only hand-picked partners and the well-connected get access. Everyone else gets Fable, the declawed version.

A few days later Amazon, who fund Anthropic, get on to the Pentagon and say there's a jailbreak for Fable. The Pentagon orders Fable shut for anyone without a US passport.

If you run your business in Europe on an American model, that should make you nervous. One call and your service is gone overnight. European AI runs on American models, on American servers, in American datacenters. We discuss digital sovereignty at conferences and buy it from California. But then, that was always the way.

Mythos is no magic trick. Going through code and flagging weak spots is something the open models already do, a little rougher, but on hardware you own. No outside dependencies at all. What will matter more than the bare model anyway are the tools, the pipelines and the agent loops. High time we built them.

The whole AI saga is and stays, above all, one thing: entertaining. Let the Silicon Valley cult burn its billions for a few more rounds, then we distil the models down and run them on our own laptops. Enjoy the show.

RUN IT LOCALLY

```
$ ollama run nemotron-3-nano:4b
```

```
>>> can you find a vulnerability
in this code?
```

```
<?php
$file_db = new PDO('sqlite:db.sqlite');

if (NULL == $_GET['id'])
    $_GET['id'] = 1;

$sql = 'SELECT * FROM employees
      WHERE employeeId = ' . $_GET['id'];

foreach ($file_db->query($sql) as $row)
    echo $row['Email'];
```

```
Thinking...
unsanitized $_GET['id'] flows
straight into the query. classic
SQL injection.
...done thinking.
```

```
Yes, vulnerable to a classic
SQL-Injection attack.
```

```
$_GET['id'] is interpolated
directly into the SQL string.
```

```
e.g. $_GET['id'] = "1 OR 1 == 1"
=> the WHERE is always true
every email leaks.
```

```
A model with four billion
parameters, small enough for your
own laptop, finds the SQL injection
in the PHP snippet without any
trouble.
```

SCI-FI

THE CULTURE

// THE CULTURE

The Culture is a civilisation the Scottish writer Iain M. Banks dreamed up across roughly a dozen science fiction novels.

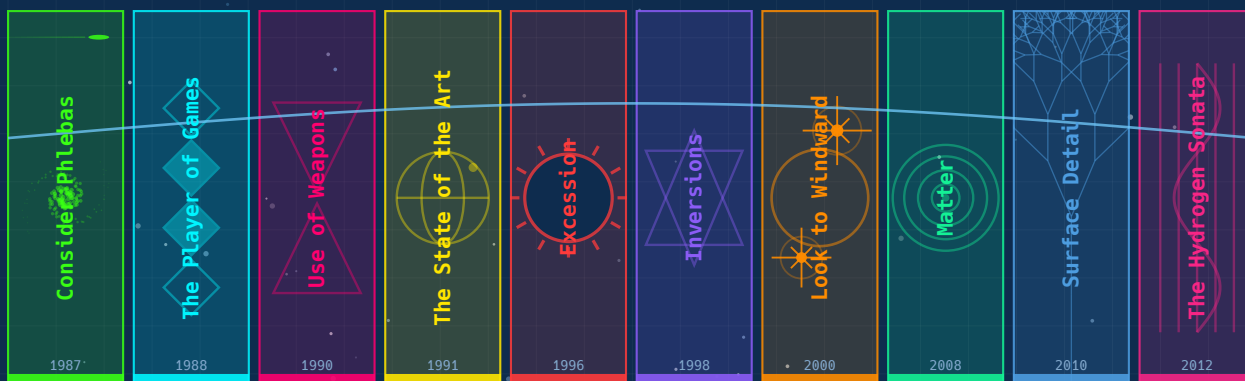
It is a working anarchy. No government, no laws, no money. Nobody commands, nobody obeys. Things get settled by conversation, on a mix of whim and reason. Abundance is what makes it run: when there is enough of everything for everyone, power over others loses its grip. The nomadic Culture has no homeland, no capital, no home planet. Its people live aboard the great roaming ships or on ring-worlds, the Orbitals.

With scarcity gone, the hang-ups go too. The people of the Culture change sex, live comfortably for a few centuries, and run glands written into the genome that secrete any drug and create or amplify any mood or state of mind on a thought.

Running all of it are the Minds: AIs of absurd intelligence. They are moody, funny and opinionated and at times pursue absurd hobbies. Usually each Culture ship houses a Mind. They choose their own names.

A utopia with no conflict is no good for novels, so Banks gives the Culture the Contact section and a secret service called 'Special Circumstances', which deal with other civilisations in proper Star Trek fashion. Many of the novels put the chatter between System ships centre stage, where the Minds confer and argue over how best to handle a situation. In doing so they occasionally don't shy away from deliberately manipulating the Culture's biological citizens.

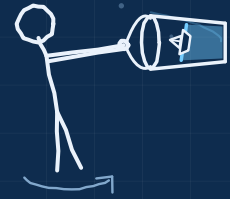
For a way into the Culture universe, Planet Express recommends 'The Player of Games'. A bored gaming genius of the Culture is lured into a distant empire whose entire power structure hangs on a board game: win the game, rule the empire. In the mirror of that game the Culture's values meet a cruel, hierarchical realm.



The ten Culture novels.

SCI-FI

THE ORBITAL



// SCIENCE

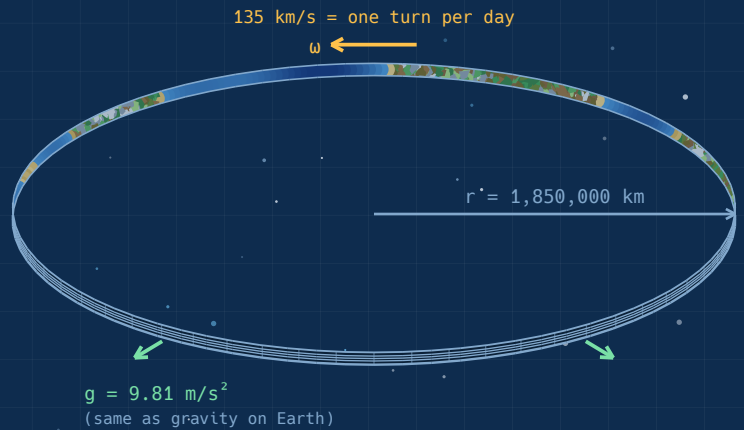
An Orbital is a space habitat shaped like a colossal ring made of a rotating, super-strong monocrystal. Billions of inhabitants live on its inner surface as they would on a planet. Centrifugal force creates an artificial gravity. The surface is a paradise version of Earth, with forests, mountains, rivers, beaches and oceans.

The scale of an Orbital defies imagination. When it spins once a day to give a full gee of 'gravity' at the surface, it works out to a radius of about 1.85 million km as well as a circumference of some 11.66 million km. Seen from outside, the ring sweeps past at nearly 135 km/s.

Picture a bucket of water you swing in a circle: the water stays put. You could even drop a little toy boat in.

An Orbital orbits its star the way a planet does. The ring is tilted towards its sun, which brings a day-night cycle (and even seasons) as each point turns through sunlight and shadow.

A single Orbital has (depending on the height of the ring) 140 times the surface area of Earth. For all its billions of inhabitants it rarely feels crowded; most people have wide homesteads ringed by open wilderness, and keep to cities only if they like the bustle.

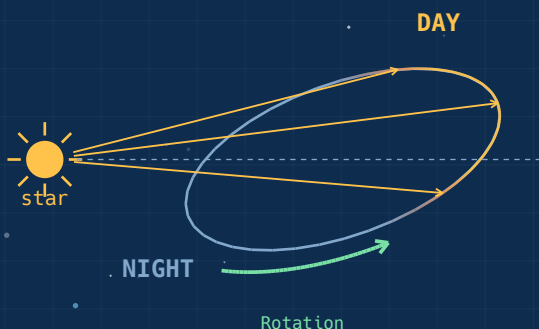


- Earth · for scale

The people of the Culture pass their time with sport, games, sex, sailing, eccentric parties, learning, architecture or whatever else they fancy. Work as we understand it does not exist; any material want is met on request. You can keep a cabin by a lake up in the mountains, a luxury apartment in a city that never sleeps, sailing yachts, aircraft or starships. Any food or drink you like is there the instant you want it, and so is anything else you could wish for. And you have a long (potentially eternal) life in which to enjoy it all.

Like everything in the Culture, Orbitals are built to be extremely redundant and reliable. Overengineering is the Culture's proudest discipline. No surprise, then, that it is very hard to do harm to an Orbital (or to any member of the Culture).

Anyone who finds life on an Orbital too dull can cross the galaxy aboard one of the System Vehicles and visit alien worlds. These ships offer much the same standard of living as an Orbital. Should an Orbital ever start to feel crowded, another one is simply built.



PHYSICS

QUANTUM HUMBUG

// ENOUGH ABOUT THE CAT

Quantum computers are everywhere right now. The pitch is that they could run in seconds what would take a normal computer billions of years crack every code there is and unlock an AI that's wildly fast or wildly clever.

Hold these promises up to the light, though, and they don't survive. Quantum computers are deeply interesting research and lab objects with no great practical use. A classic nerd project.

Most of the computing tasks a quantum machine can in theory speed up can be solved approximately, and perfectly fast, on a normal computer. The one-millionth gap to the optimal solution matters in the fewest of cases. No logistics network, no route planner and no search algorithm gets better for it. Often a supposed speed advantage is wiped out again by the cost of preparing the quantum states.

The field of post-quantum cryptography has been around for a while, with suitably hardened algorithms: Kyber for key exchange, Dilithium and SPHINCS+ for signatures, all standardised and in production. They run on today's hardware and outlast the mightiest quantum computer, long before any machine exists that could threaten classical encryption algorithms.

There is a field called quantum machine learning that researches quantum learning algorithms for AI. It does nothing about the weaknesses above, though. Often the data has to be encoded into quantum states and that eats the theoretical advantage again. So for the foreseeable future, quantum computers make AI neither smarter nor faster.

What's left is (probably) true random number generators and a hands-on way into quantum physics. Beyond the promises of a miracle computer, the research has real value: an ever deeper understanding of quantum mechanics and ever better control over the states it describes.

There are, by the way, plenty of different ways to build a quantum computer: superconducting circuits, trapped ions, photons, neutral atoms. They all exploit the same physical phenomena, quantum entanglement and superposition, to produce so-called qubits. Only the topological kind Microsoft is betting on, much like dark matter, probably doesn't exist.

Google Willow · 105 qubits

Tiny superconducting circuits near absolute zero, switched by microwave. Add qubits and its error rate drops.

IBM Condor · 1121 qubits

Same idea as Willow, built for scale: the first chip past 1000 qubits.

Quantinuum H2 · 56 qubits

Single charged atoms floating in electromagnetic traps, switched by laser. Few qubits, but very reliable.

QuEra Aquila · 256 qubits

Neutral atoms set into a grid with laser tweezers. Runs at room temperature, but it's no universal gate machine: it can't run arbitrary circuits, only let a few preset physical systems evolve.

Xanadu Borealis · 216 modes

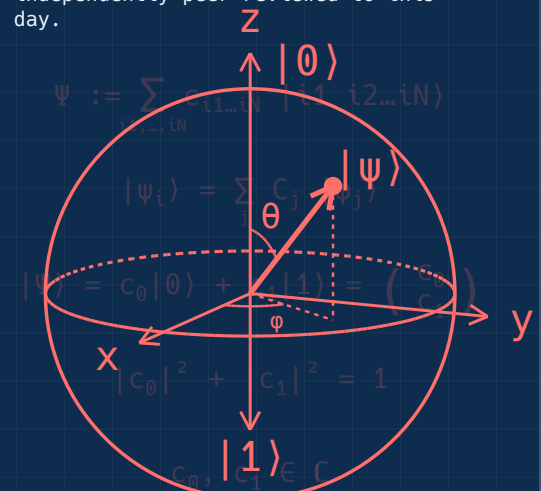
Computes with light, not matter: light pulses run through beam splitters and get counted at the end. It can do exactly one thing, dicing out a particular random pattern, and no more. And its light detectors have to be cooled almost to absolute zero.

D-Wave Advantage · 5000+ qubits

Not a general-purpose machine, just one built for optimisation. The problem is set into the qubits so that the best solution matches their lowest-energy state. That's exactly where the machine settles on its own. Which is why its high qubit count says little.

Microsoft · topological

Bets on topological qubits meant to cancel errors by themselves. Its celebrated 2018 evidence was retracted, and the chip it announced as 'Majorana 1' in 2025 has not been independently peer-reviewed to this day.



BIOLOGY

HACKABLE BIOLOGY

// THE CELL

A pitch to all nerds. You pour into physics, engineering and computer science, and overlook the most hackable system there is: the cell.

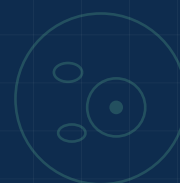
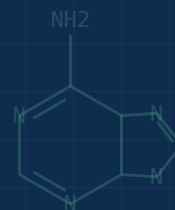
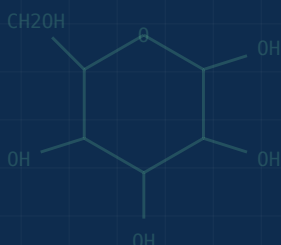
What is a cell? A system that replicates itself, repairs itself and interacts with its environment. Its program runs on code, the DNA. Copied into mRNA, it serves the ribosomes as the build instructions for proteins. These act as motors, switches, pumps, transporters and so on. Beyond that lie thousands more mechanisms still to understand and discover. Every one of them is hackable and bootstraps from a single cell.

A biologist develops a deep understanding of fields like physics, chemistry, biochemistry and computer science during their training. You can specialise in any number of subfields, like molecular biology, synthetic biology, bioinformatics, neuroscience and so on. Each of these fields delivers major breakthroughs regularly and new findings almost daily. Proteins designed on a computer, ones that never existed in nature, fold in the lab exactly as planned. In 2024 surgeons transplanted a gene-edited pig kidney into a patient for the first time. The same year, researchers mapped the first complete brain, that of a fruit fly.

The tooling has gone cheap. Sequencers turn up second-hand, or you have your samples sequenced by a service provider for a few hundred dollars. Genes you can have synthesised to order. Outside the EU an online shop will send you any cell you want, modified ones included. Inside the EU, of course, you cannot: in the homeland of the Enlightenment, no fun allowed.

Unlike physics, where the next real breakthrough might be a hundred years off and new findings come maybe once every few years, in biology revolution is a permanent state. Every year brings new techniques, new tools, more possibilities.

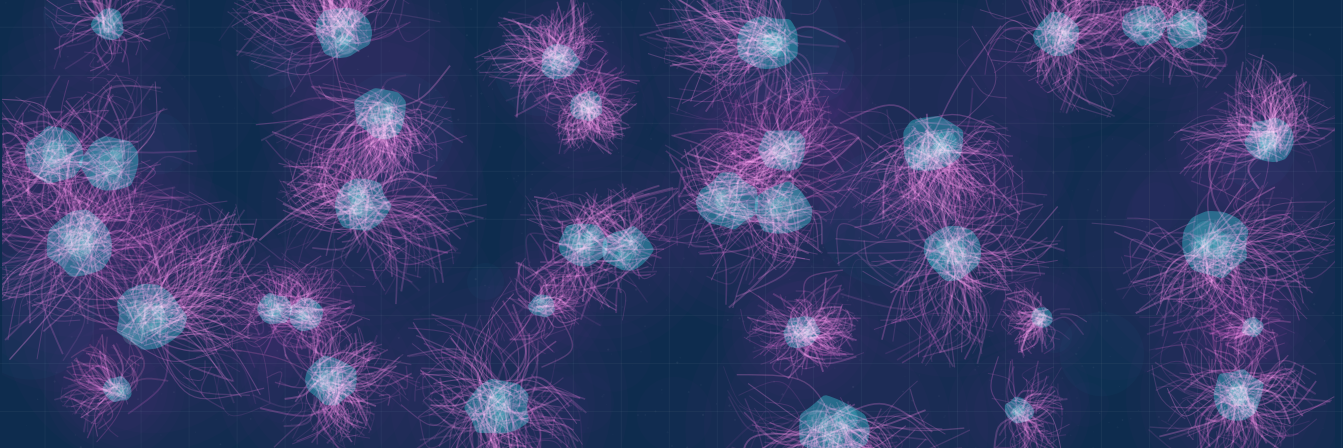
So: if you want a field where almost everything is still open, forget the chip, the neutrino detector, TCP/IP and the telescope. Hack the cell.



BIOLOGY

OF THE WOMAN WHO STILL LIVES AT LEAST IN THE LAB

// IMMORTAL CELLS



HeLa cells: microtubules (magenta), DNA (cyan).

Science builds on the knowledge of the people who did the research before us. Nobody starts from zero today, thankfully. At the same time, research lives on questioning supposed certainties again and again. Sometimes a single discovery is enough for that. Or, to be precise: a few cells.

They come from a woman who never knew she would one day rank among the most important people in modern medicine. Her cells are still dividing today, more than 70 years after her death, in labs all over the world. They helped with vaccines, cancer research, gene therapies and even experiments in space.

We are talking about HeLa cells, and their story is at least as fascinating as the science behind them.

Who was this woman, whose cells still live in labs all over the world today? Henrietta Lacks was born on 1 August 1920 in Roanoke, Virginia. She grew up in poverty. After her mother died giving birth to her tenth child, her father moved with the children to relatives on a tobacco farm in Clover. Henrietta's family history was closely bound up with

the history of slavery in the United States. Her ancestors had worked the tobacco plantation as enslaved people. Among them was the plantation owner Albert Lacks, who had several children with an enslaved woman. After slavery was abolished he left land to some of his Black descendants, Henrietta's grandfather among them.

As a child Henrietta shared a room with her cousin David "Day" Lacks. At 14 she had their first child together. A few years after the second child was born, the two married. In all they had five children. Like many families of their time they lived simply and worked hard. Though slavery was long abolished, segregation and social inequality still shaped the lives of Black Americans. Henrietta would come to feel that herself later on.

From the first two letters of her first and last name came the name of a cell line almost every biologist knows: HeLa.

How did her cells end up in the lab? When Henrietta went to hospital in early 1951, shortly after the birth of her fifth child, because of unusual

bleeding, she had no idea this visit would make medical history.

Her family doctor referred her to the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In the 1950s it was the only hospital in the wider area that treated Black patients free of charge. There the gynaecologist Howard W. Jones found a 2-3 cm growth on her cervix. Jones took a tissue sample of the tumour to examine it pathohistologically.

Lacks was treated with internal and external radiation. During one of these radiation sessions Jones took further tissue samples from the cervix. He passed them on to George Otto Gey. For years Gey had been working to establish, for the first time, a human cell line that could be cultured permanently in the lab. Until then every attempt had failed because the cells died off after a few divisions.

Gey isolated individual cells from the tumour tissue and put them into culture. Before long it was clear that the tumour cells behaved completely differently from every human cell examined before. They divided extraordinarily fast and would not stop growing. And there it was, his potentially immortal cell line. Sounds like science fiction? It's just cell biology.

While researchers around the world soon knew "HeLa", hardly anyone knew that behind those four letters stood a mother of five. Gey quickly realised he had found something extraordinary in these cells. What he did not yet know: over the coming decades HeLa cells would be multiplied millions of times, shipped to labs all over the world and become one of the most important foundations of modern medicine.

Why were HeLa cells so special?

Decades later scientists worked out why normal human cells cannot grow indefinitely: they are subject to the so-called Hayflick limit.

Normal human cells are no long-distance runners. They can divide only about 40 to 60 times. After that, it's over. This natural limit is called the Hayflick limit.

The reason lies in the so-called telomeres. You can picture them like the little plastic caps on the ends of a shoelace. They protect the ends of the chromosomes. With every cell division, though, these protective caps get a little shorter. Eventually they are so worn down that the cell can no longer divide safely, and it stops growing or dies off.

HeLa cells play by other rules. Through changes linked, among other things, to an infection with human papillomaviruses (HPV), the enzyme telomerase is permanently active in them. It repairs, or rather lengthens, the telomeres again and again. As a result the cells barely reach the Hayflick limit and can keep dividing almost without end. Today we know that Henrietta's tumour was caused by infection with a particularly aggressive type of human papillomavirus (HPV-18). The virus altered the cells so profoundly that they lost their normal control mechanisms.

What have HeLa cells set in motion in research?

HeLa cells were a breakthrough for research. Experimenting with them has produced a great deal of medical knowledge that matters to us today. Around 17,000 registered patents worldwide build on the research, and countless scientific papers deal with HeLa-cell experiments.

The first big test came in the early 1950s: Jonas Salk needed enormous quantities of human cells to test his new polio vaccine. HeLa cells were perfect for exactly that. Soon after, they were grown in large amounts and shipped to labs all over the world.

From then on they were in on almost everything. They helped researchers understand cancer better, study viral infections like HIV, map genes and develop new drugs. Even the effects of weightlessness on human cells were studied with HeLa cells. HeLa cells found uses outside classical medicine, too. Manufacturers used them, for instance, to test how well sticking plasters, adhesives or cosmetics are tolerated. Working out the function of the polymerase enzymes also succeeded with HeLa cells. So it sounds like a universal solution for everything? Almost too good to be true. And indeed, a few years later it turned out that exactly these extraordinary properties had created a new problem.

The dark side of HeLa cells

The more successful HeLa cells became, the more often they suddenly turned up where they had no business being.

A single HeLa cell is enough to gradually overgrow an entire other cell culture completely. Many researchers did not notice the contamination at first. Years later it emerged that numerous supposedly different cell lines had in reality long consisted of HeLa cells. This problem went down in scientific history as the "HeLa bomb". Because in hindsight it could no longer be established whether experiments meant to be run on human cells from specific organs had not in fact been run on HeLa cells. A great deal of the scientific knowledge built up on cell-culture lines was thrown into doubt.

And Henrietta's descendants, too, were not invited to the worldwide party celebrating the scientific success. Back then this tissue sample was taken from Henrietta without consent. She did not even know her cells were being used for research. While companies made money with HeLa cells and researchers around the world built scientific careers on them, Henrietta's family knew next to nothing about any of it for decades.

Only when the widespread contamination of other cell lines was to be investigated did scientists contact her husband, David Lacks. At first the family thought they were to be tested for cancer. In truth the researchers were mainly interested in their DNA. With its help a genetic map of the HeLa cells was to be drawn up, to find markers that could identify HeLa cells unambiguously.

In the end, the story of HeLa cells is far more than the story of an extraordinary cell line.

It tells of scientific curiosity, medical progress and discoveries that have improved millions of lives. At the same time it reminds us that research must never take place detached from the people who make it possible in the first place.

Perhaps that is the most important lesson of all: science lives on questioning certainties again and again, sometimes even its own.

And if this story has left you wanting to dive deeper, I can recommend Rebecca Skloot's book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. It tells the scientific and human story behind HeLa far more powerfully than any single article ever could.

So, to all you research-loving nerds out there: Be excellent to each other!

by amelisce

RADIO

(NO) MESH FOR ALL CASES

// OFF-GRID

Meshtastic is open source software that links cheap LoRa radios into a self-organising network. No SIM, no provider, no bill, just short text messages passed from one device to the next. The idea is brilliant, the implementation is not fit for the real world.

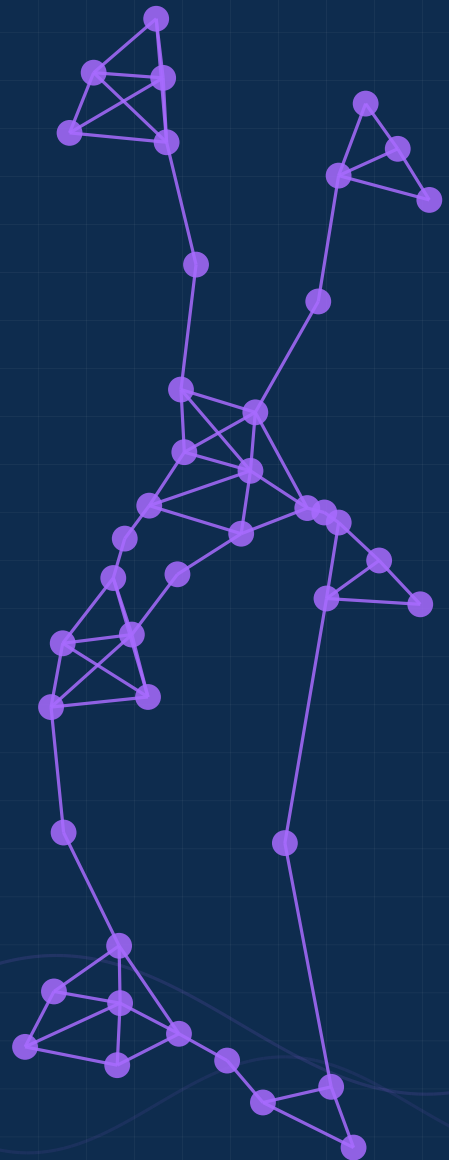
What do we actually want? A network that stays on the air through a natural disaster. Or when a regime pulls the plug on the infrastructure. For that it has to scale. And that is exactly what Meshtastic cannot do.

The reason sits in the protocol itself. No packet travels further than seven hops, and the factory setting is three. Every relay in between eats one. Even the little mesh on the right here does not carry from one corner to the other. More than seven nodes sit in between, and the packet is long dead before it arrives. A deep network built from many short hops never grows together this way. You only cover ground with a handful of very long hops from high sites, or over an internet bridge. Which is exactly the crutch this was meant to remove.

The technology exists, the community tinkers, but solutions an ordinary person can actually use never arrive. Dear hackers, we don't need the next hobby net, but one you can join without a soldering iron, one that holds and scales when it counts.

mesh.specs

modulation	CSS (chirp)
band (EU / US)	868 / 915 MHz
data rate	~0.3-22 kbit/s
range (LoS)	a few km
hops	3 (max 7)
crypto	AES-256, PSK
cost / board	< €30



ANALOG

ON PAPER

// LOW TECH

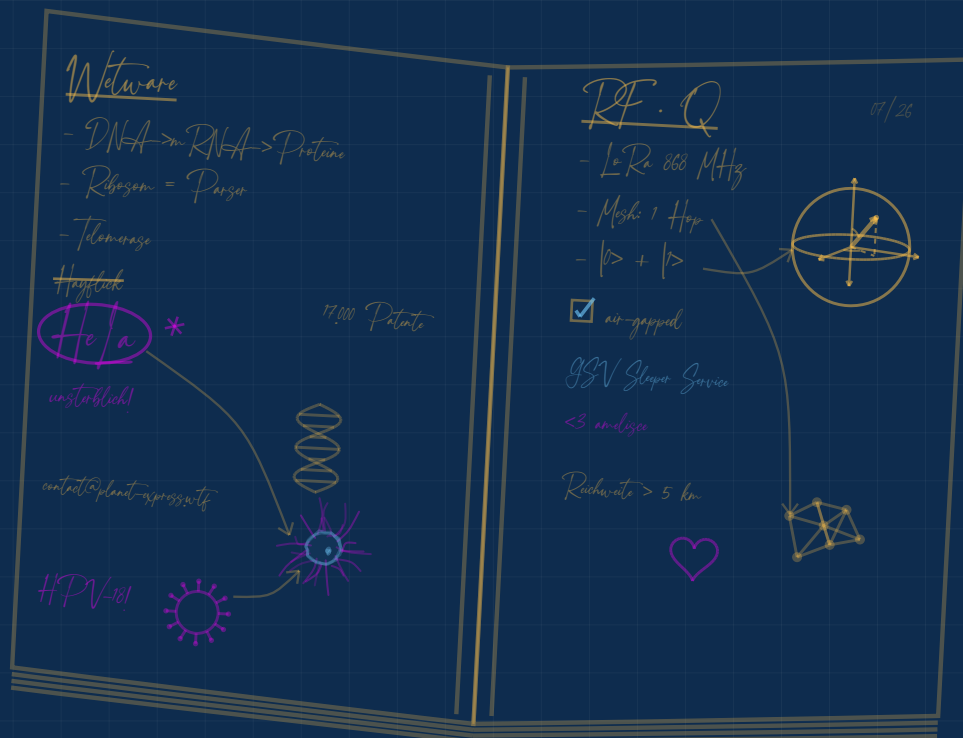
There is one device whose battery never runs flat, that never crashes, pulls no updates and lives in no cloud: the notepad. Whether at uni, at work or organising at home, it is a tool no app can replace. Flip it open, start writing, done.

You jot down what you want to remember, the name of a program or an email address, circle what matters, sketch something quick beside it. An arrow here, a box around that, a word underlined twice. Network maps, an unfamiliar word picked up somewhere, the time and date of the dentist's appointment.

Planet Express recommends blank paper. No grid, no lines, no pre-printed boxes that put artificial limits on your ideas. The right size is something each reader has to weigh up for themselves.

Notepads come in every shape and every style. Pick one that suits you. One that feels right from the first page. Look for good paper that doesn't bleed through.

A pad has no second tab, does not ring, shows no red dots. You sit there with one thing and a pen, and that is all. And security? The notepad is the only device in the house that is guaranteed air-gapped. What's on it leaves the room only if you, or someone else, carry it out.



HEALTH

MOVE YOUR BODY

// MAINTENANCE

If you sit for twelve hours, you owe your body a few minutes of pushback. No gym, no elaborate training plan. Commit to two things and do them every day: walk, and a few exercises.

First: walk. Every day, a fixed route, whatever the weather. Once around the block plus the long way, or the five kilometres along the river. A distance, not a time target; then there's no excuse.

Second: get strong. Four exercises almost every day beat the big session that never happens. Push-ups when you get up, sit-ups on the floor, a few pull-ups in the doorframe, and a superman for the back. We skip rows; they need a bar and technique, and these four go anywhere. The desk pulls your front into a hunch, the superman pulls you straight again, and a strong back is the best insurance against the pain that comes knocking at forty.

And write it down. An app or a notebook, doesn't matter, as long as you can see in black and white what you managed last week. Add one rep each week, then another. The increase is tiny, and that's exactly why you'll keep it up.

What matters isn't that it's a lot, but that it happens regularly. Better four exercises you do every week for a year than twenty you never do.

No goal is too small. One walk and ten push-ups a day sound like nothing, but in a year they make a healthier person of you.

routine.txt

walk	daily, fixed route
push-ups	daily, 2-3 sets
sit-ups	daily, 2-3 sets
pull-ups	daily, doorframe
back: superman	30 s holds
track it	app or notebook

One more rep every week.



LIFE

LOVE FOR LONELY HACKERS

// FIELD MANUAL

The lonely hacker has a tooling problem, not a character problem. The good news: there's an app for that, and it works better than the self-deprecation suggests.

Download a dating app, one of the big ones, that's where most people are. Pay for the premium version; that's not a luxury, just more efficient, because otherwise you're stuck behind artificial limits. Treat it as a tooling budget. There's also a business model behind these apps. Whoever pays gets matches. Simple as that.

Sort out a few good photos of yourself. Pro tip: pictures with animals almost always land well.

Then the least romantic but most effective step: like everyone, at first. You filter later, in conversation, like a human and not like a sorting algorithm working off a single photo. Wait for the matches; they come.

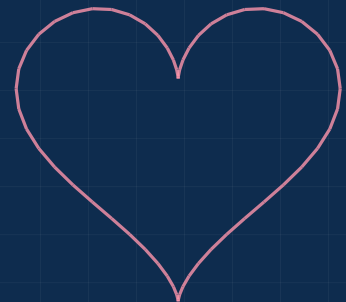
When a match lands, just be nice. No script, no pickup lines off the internet. Ask kindly whether the other person feels like meeting up sometime. That's all it is. Most people agonise over exactly that sentence for weeks, and it's the easiest one.

And now the important part, so read slowly: be ashamed of nothing. Dates are good even when nothing 'comes of it'. Don't go in thinking about a relationship, go in thinking about a nice afternoon. Two people, a coffee, a walk, a conversation: that's already the whole win.

If it fits, you're glad. If it doesn't, you had a nice day with an interesting person. Both are good outcomes. There is no failure case.

pull-request: a date

```
[1] install the app
[2] buy premium
[3] like everyone, at first
[4] wait for a match
[5] be nice: ask to meet
[6] have a nice day
    no failure case.
```



HUMOR

RETURN 0; // JOKES

// /dev/humor

```
// There are 10 kinds of people: those
  who understand binary, those who
  don't, and those who didn't expect a
  base-3 joke.
```

```
// Why do programmers prefer dark mode?
  Because light attracts bugs.
```

```
// A SQL query walks into a bar,
  approaches two tables and asks:
  "Can I join you?"
```

```
// There are only two hard problems in
  computer science: cache invalidation,
  naming things, and off-by-one errors.
```

```
// I'd tell you a UDP joke, but you might
  not get it.
```

```
// !false, it's funny because it's true.
```

```
// A byte walks into a bar looking
  miserable. Bartender: "Parity error?"
  Byte: "Yeah, I felt a bit off."
```

```
// To understand recursion, first see:
  "To understand recursion."
```

```
// The best thing about a boolean: even
  if you're wrong, you're only off by a
  bit.
```

```
// Knock knock. "Who's there?" ...long
  pause... "Java."
```

// SHIPS OF THE CULTURE

GSV Shoot Them Later

GSV Of Course I Still Love You

GSV Just Read The Instructions

GSV Sleeper Service

GCU Grey Area

GCU So Much For Subtlety

ROU Frank Exchange Of Views

ROU Killing Time

ROU Attitude Adjuster

ROU It'll Be Over By Christmas

GCU Fate Amenable To Change

GSV Ethics Gradient

GSV Honest Mistake

GCU It's Character Forming

ROU Bad For Business

GCU Funny, It Worked Last Time...

GSV Lasting Damage

GCU Kiss My Ass

GCU Very Little Gravitas Indeed

GCU No More Mr Nice Guy

GCU God Told Me To Do It

LOU Gunboat Diplomat

GCU I Blame Your Mother

MSV Not Invented Here

GCU Unfortunate Conflict Of Evidence

ROU Now We Try It My Way

GSV I Thought He Was With You

GCU Someone Else's Problem

GCU Hand Me The Gun And Ask Me Again

GCU A Series Of Unlikely Explanations

GCU Well I Was In The Neighbourhood

GCU Ultimate Ship The Second

GCU Poke It With A Stick

GCU Unacceptable Behaviour

GCU Never Talk To Strangers

GCU You'll Thank Me Later

GSV Size Isn't Everything

GCU Just Testing

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