Everyone in Shanghai knows what a neikonaut looks like.

And if you don't — board a train bound for Pudong, and find it peppered with young people in designer silks and Italian leather and gold rings, paired with a puffy vest from a large financial firm. You'll see some false positives: middle managers, or regular traders in a less intimate relationship with their Bloomberg terminals. The giveaway is the hair, with cutouts where they need to be for the sensors to make contact. Or the fact that he's — let's face it — he's sitting half-lotus across three subway seats, dutifully clearing his mind. You glance at him, he glares at you, and you go back to playing *mihuan mengyuan* on your wanji.

Or maybe it's just dusk, and you see him stumbling out of the Suowei or Paracoin offices with three or four of his work buddies. His vision is still wobbling from a day in loop-lock, or maybe he's already hitting his tryptamine pen, dipping back in to smooth over painful fragments of arcane and proprietary trading algorithms. Maybe it's nighttime in Xintiandi, and there are whole packs of them wandering the streets, cheering and jeering in lines outside basement clubs and crash-landing their veetles in the flowerbeds. They've switched to tacts and phens by now — no cross-tolerance with the work stuff — and they've mostly shed their vests for gauzy black shirts, chunky heeled boots, and nightshades. You look at him, his eyes graze you, but then you realize he's staring at the dripping neon quasigram behind you, seeing it move in ways you can't.

Or maybe it's far past midnight in one of those Xintiandi basements, and the smoke is doing funny things to the lights, and the lights are doing funny things to the music, and you think the bassline might come up on your EKG, and his too when you see him. In ultraviolet light you see those tattoos clearly: blacklit loops and whorls across his torso and arms. Inscrutable obscenities and vows. And then for a moment, his dilated eyes. Briefly you imagine what might be left over behind them, what it could possibly be like to go through life that way. Whether he's trying to remember, or trying to forget.

*That's* a neikonaut, and maybe it's no secret why the word picks up a kind of sneering, rhotic derision as it leaves the mouth of your typical *Shanghairen*. Everyone knows that it all comes back to them — the estrangement with Beijing, the fragmentation of a single city into hundreds of wards, the parallel yuan. Then there's the weirder stuff, the smoke between your fingers at the bottom of the bottle, the way it all just feels haunted. Even the biggest detractors have conceded neikotics isn't *causing* mass psychosis, not directly. Even the CCP calls it *quadratic belief.* But when you step outside and discarded vials of huixing and qingtingcrunch beneath your feet, street names barely emerged from a primordial alphabet soup — well, who else is there to blame?