For one moment, I'm soaring over a vast, hyperbolic horizon — just enjoying the sensation of forgotten senses coming online and background caches warming to full. I limber up, becoming a ring through which I pass a sphere, which bursts spiky with my heartbeat until it becomes a polyhedron that tessellates across a hyperplane, which I slice into countless layers, overlaying them into a mosaic stretched across my inner light, through which an almost heartbreakingly beautiful proof of the four-color theorem shines. I swoop downwards into a thicket of tubular combinators, piping them together into a machine that rumbles and churns and ejects Merseinne primes like psychedelic parade floats. Okay, still a little stiff, but I'm satisfied that I'm not going to fry myself with a misfired tail call. I push harder on the throttle at the edge of my awareness, retracting my hundreds of appendages into something speedy and compact, and slam through a wall that I just willed into existence like a raindrop hitting a pond.

It would be silly, reductive, to call what's on the other side of this my *desktop*. It would be borderline profane to call the hyperobjects that populate it, these glassy meteorites from the Platonic realm, *files and programs*. But this place, a mandala of columns and alcoves and archways, a faintly cotton-candy calm, pulsating with gossamer isomorphisms...it *is* where I keep the constructs I use the most in tilespace. They burst into view, utterly impossible to imagine down there in soberspace, but utterly unremarkable up here. Many, naturally, are inversion capsules: hefty, translucent carapaces with the eyefeel of quality plastic, some sealed tight and others halfway-reverse engineered, spilling their hypnotically-flashing logical guts. Pre-packaged antidotes to different classes of neikotic debris. A boring day in the clinic involves firing these into patients' minds without entering loop-lock myself.

And more. Spiky, wiry solutions to old problems sets. Lenses and lemmas and lightboxes pigeonholed in a haphazard way that I promise makes sense to me, at least on drugs. Fragmentary subroutines like undulating pasta shapes that look useful, if I could still distinguish their input and output holes. Plenty of the rest are just playthings, little puzzle boxes that radiate humor and astonishment. I should really print a few of these as a treat for my sober self.

A citrus-washed kite of tiles, a string of characters, makes itself known. Yao is trying to communicate with me. The thought from down there is too long in one dimension and utterly flat in all the others. It whips around in the selfhot darkglow of my eta-band currents, crumples under the weight of the shifting tiles. But I know what he’s trying to say: *you ready*? I drop a simple U+1F44D THUMBS UP downwards in response.

Down there he fiddles with knobs. The Bridge is coming online. A distant wind whistles through me; somewhere, a brand new aperture. I become still, the tiles around me fading from electric blue to faintest periwinkle, and attune myself to a minute pressure differential coming from many distinct directions. I imagine each of these to be a hole in the tiles, opening up and winding into deep darkness. My vista, and my sense of my own shape (for there really is no difference here) becomes birdbone-hollow, pockmarked with wormways. I let the pressure rip me gently and even pleasurably apart through hundreds of these tubes at once. Dark now, but pockmarked with flashes of businesslike luminescence, each of these pathways where I am. A program that Dr. Deng wrote fifteen years ago is operating on me, and it's in my interest not to interfere. For a time I feel large, faint, and very dispersed, so that I can even sense the largest scale of the processor architecture which is massaging me, compacting me — I am beginning to feel small and nearly bullet-like, a shape like the inversion capsules. It comes together very quickly near the end, and spits me out with a *thwoop*.

Not for the first time I wonder if, all those years ago, Dr. Deng could have had any idea how magnificently cliché it would feel to approach the boundary of another mind. The space is cavernous and midnight blue; I am a small, shiny capsule drawn at a measured pace towards the very center of a swirling vortex, a portal-like discontinuity, deep emerald flecked with yellow on the other side. It's impossible to describe almost anything about loop-lock in a satisfying way — but for this in particular, I refer you to *Kuayu Yingxiong*, a sci-fi blockbuster that came out around when Deng was, like, seventeen.

The portal bulges behind me as I cross. Gossamer strands in my wake pulse with telemetry. The Bridge isn't using very much memory — Deng's terse, infuriating Rust was handwritten for an earlier age — and most of my mind is actually just idling. I play a little trick with my attention: I zoom back outwards so the drama of the probe and the vortex feels like something happening with my index finger. Back in again, so it fills my attention, the rest of my mind a yawning void. Here, thick clouds of deep green tiles surround me, flashing with voxelized thunderclaps of computation. The unknowable thoughts of another mind in loop-lock.

I make my way inwards in my diving-bell shape, curious if Mbetethi can feel me yet.

For a neikonaut accustomed to the wild freedom of solo loop-lock, the Bridge would be a disconcerting, even frightengly constricted experience. And, well, it is. Inside the diving-bell the tiles are mine and mine alone. But they — *I* — run up quickly against unyielding walls that separate my patient from myself. Briefly I attempt to think thoughts — that is, attempt computations — that run out of tiles and painfully segfault against its pricky-static pixel-hot boundary. Here, the Bridge works tick-by-tick to maintain separation between this little bubble of *me* and the rest of Mbetethi's mind. It takes a few deep breaths to find my footing in tighter loops and simpler heuristics.

When the capsule starts to feel forgiving, even a little roomy, I push for the boundary again, this time with calibrated effort instead of flailing panic. All I do for a long while is attune myself to the static at our boundary until I start to pick out the unfamiliar rhythm of Mbetethi's mind. *It's all wrong! How can he even —* but with a practiced burst of intention, I give myself over to the alien logic of his tiles. It's nauseating, then merely uncomfortable...and so on. All I really have to do is sit with it, feeling the Bridge ebb and flow, feeling the boundary blur. Mbetethi's internal logic becomes familiar, then amusing, then even a little endearing, and soon I can play it out for myself. There's phase lag, and plenty of little bursts of static where I get it wrong, but mostly there's a surface where it's hard to say where I end and he begins.

*{{What — impossible — in the fuck did you — ??}}*

What comes rippling into the capsule could almost be a fragment of my own thoughts.

{{Y*ou're doing great. We can take as long as you need to make sure you're comfortable. What's most important is that you relax. The Bridge is keeping us both safe.}}*

I offer this back, double-stuffed with reassurances and devoid of double negatives, knowing how much will be lost in translation. And for a time, nothing much happens at the boundary. I try to reason out just what this guydoes in loop-lock. I sample the hypnotic flashes of his tiles, serialize them up the increasingly narrow strands of self leading back out the Bridge. *Yep, he’s a trader.* The rest of my mind responds on a long delay as I point myself around like a periscope.

*That’s the contract API for the parallel yuan. Standard stuff.*

*That’s a black-market approximation of Paracoin’s L2 forex flow lattice.*

*That’s...uh, don’t get any closer to that.*

But these are bumps in the dark. mostly I see nothing, unknowability, dark green silt.

*{{ — next?}}* After a time Mbetethi seems to have accepted that I'm living in his head, rent-free.

*{{I need freedom to reshape myself. You need to allow my tiles to seep into yours. This happens naturally. You may notice that you've become more comfortable with my patterns of thought.}}*

When they realize this, they always tense up. I brace for the jolt. Some forays with the Bridge fail right here when patients can't get the knack of intentionally sharing tiles, but in a few hundred ticks I feel a loosening. An invitation. I'm impressed, but to say so would only trip him up.

*{{The Bridge will prevent me from growing too large, too quickly, within your mind.}}*

*{{That — — not worried — — all day. Feel way — — than down — }}*

*{{I will keep my movement slow and careful. There is nothing to worry about.}}*

And that's hardly just for his benefit. I barely understand what most of his tiles are doing; I need to move gingerly or I could be zeroed out by a stray allocator. I focus on squeezing myself through dormant blocks of memory, fractal-catacombs that morph just gradually enough for me to keep up.

{{*So what am I looking for?}}*

These free blocks are a treasure trove of neikotic debris. Halite-crystal chunks of old order books, abandoned state machines bubbling into nondeterminism, even a glimpse of a stray alpha-beta pruner whipping past like a tarantula-boomerang. Mbetethi's way overdue for a cleaning. But these are minor headaches, maybe blurred vision...

*{{ — — Don't know — hiding — — out here — — away — }}*

Interesting. This tiny slice of Mbetethi at the edge of his mind is either the most cowardly, or the most sensible.

{{*Hmm. Okay. Which way is in?}}*

I bud off a closure: the tiniest, most portable subroutine, containing only this question. Mbetethi's tiles poke and prod, finally executing it as though biting into a battered something at a seaside fry shack. It goes whirring off into his depths...

*{{ — ah — ooh — — — tickles — }}*

...and returns triumphantly some kiloticks later, bobbing in the tile mist, inviting me to follow.

{{ *Won't — — listen — reason —}}* warns this part of Mbetethi as I disappear into the noise.

Inwards. Trailing this vector-lantern's charted course through the thick, roiling, discretized fog. I've learned a little about the large-scale structure of Mbetethi's thoughts, and in flashes where the clouds part I see sky-high minaret callstacks, ornately geometric coral-reef mandala-trees, buzzing-thrumming event pumps, all in glossy candy-coated brilliance. It's one thing to watch this from the clinic's control bank, to get tantalizing snatches of order flashing across a flat monitor of tiles. To be here, to have been here — it wakes me up sometimes, breath ragged, sweating through the sheets.

{{ *Spectral — dimensionality — fairly — modifications — sieve* — *}}*

This part of Mbetethi explains what it knows about the debris haunting his mind. The further I go, the more tortured his computation becomes; the tiles form stuttering loops, malformed log-log trees, whole subsystems deadlocked by a broken semaphore (I flip that bit as I pass, and feel tingling waves of secondhand relief.)

*{{ Standard reduction — minor — escaped garbage — }}*

I gather from these snippets that Mbetethi was trying out a homegrown variant of a dimensionality reduction algorithm. It avoided the cleanup phase at the end of loop-lock, and its rigid edges sunk deep into the soft mantle of his organic mind as he slept.

{{ *Don't — — can still — }}*

Some parts of him are less welcoming, even insistent that I'm wasting my time. The tiles here make me queasy, flashing with checksum errors and timeout exceptions. These crumbly half-finished foundations are pierced through with a dense bramble of pointers, thickening, leading inwards...I can only describe it as a root system. I'm getting close.

{{ *Can handle — — — }}*

The rest is drowned out by pain. The Bridge can't shield me from all of it; the diving-bell buzzes discordantly with every move. The roots are thick and dense here, the bell slashes through them as I pulse ahead, but they grow back in an instant, sizzling through the tiles.

And then I’m flat against it, unyielding, a wall.