So I hand him the reins, and take to sweeping beads out from under the EASL arrays, coolant reserves, and the tryptamine cabinet. From the corner of my eye I can see a few new sullen, stubbly heads bobbing in the waiting room. “Isn’t it weird,” I ask once we’ve shot our next patient into higher dimensions, “how they’re all sat so far apart from one another? Are they scared they’ll be seen by someone on their team?”

“Suowei is *ruthless*,” Yao replies, sounding more awed than scared. “I’ve heard they set up these honeypots. They stash unclaimed ping at internal addresses you can only see if you turn off their tileguide. They leave juicy-looking eggs in the cafeteria fridges that burn up your neikotic channels for weeks. That kind of thing. And they make you sign the ping chain with an admission of guilt on your way out, otherwise you get fucked by their Bloom filters forever.”

His theory goes out the window when the next patient turns out to work for Paracoin.

After lunch, I’m supposed to attend a seminar on *Causal Dipole Manipulation via Ephaptic Coupling: The Neural Basis for Loop-Lock.* But, fun though it sounds, my curiosity gets the better of me. Instead I spend the afternoon reviewing intake forms, calling out names, and swabbing temples with electrode gel. If they all had the same symptoms, I’d probably let it go. But each of them presents with something completely different. And yet my inversion works on all of them.

Case study: Wang Yi, age twenty-three. Employer, Suowei Financial. Presents with —

“Y’know when you have unreachable rollups after using Tenfold Gate? It feels kinda like that. Tingly, *tingly* in my fingers.” He grits his teeth through what sounds like a very unpleasant sensation. “And my toes.”

He’s actually wearing the purple-and-gold Suowei neikosuit under his dress shirt and chinos, and looks a little disappointed when, starting to undress, we tell him the inversion will only take a few minutes.

Cause of debris: *unknown/decline to say* — “It’s my second day at this job,” he pleads.

After each run, the diving-bell quietly drops a .vxl file into my home directory. I peek at what was collected from Wang’s mind: a corkscrew bolus, a pasta shape from the forever realms. Structurally it scarcely resembles what I extracted from Mbetethi, but it has the same onyx-and-gold sheen. And when I look at it, I feel the same crawling, grabbing spiraling texture behind my eyes.

Case study: Gu Xiangyu, age twenty-nine. Employer, Chaoyue Labs. Presents with —

“*Auuguh chumoo geryoou...”*

This is a serious case, as bad as Mbetethi’s. Her hand shakes as she fills out the form, her expression desperate and pleading. We let her skip all the checkboxes and bring her to the front of the line. But five minutes later, she barely bothers to look at us. “I really can’t tell you anything,” she insists, pulling on a heavy black overcoat against the warm September sun. “I’d expect that you hear that every day.”

Her debris is in a classic, even stereotypical shape: a jagged rectilinear pileup, dense with crystalline lines. But the texture and color mark it as a byproduct of the same mysterious algorithm. I limit myself to a peek at each of these, and force myself not to wonder how they’d look in voxelite. How I ought to categorize them.

Case study: Bui Thien An, age twenty-five. Employer, Paracoin Technologies Limited...

By midafternoon, the last of them is gone. Yao peers into the minifridge and lobs a Tsingtao at me.

“So this is good for at least an acknowledgement, right?”

I’m a little distracted by the salt lamp casting dim orange light from the lounge end-table. It’s hard not to see it as a chunk of neikotic debris, and to wonder what it would feel like to have it lodged, dull and bulbous and a little sharp, into my unconscious mind. “Whaddaya mean?” I respond, after a pause.

“I mean your *paper*, Mona.” He sounds half deferential, half astounded by my boneheadedness. “The one that you’re gonna write about this new class of debris, and your amazing new inversion for it? *Thanks also to my trusted pal Yao Tongduan?*”

A paper hadn’t occurred to me at all, and a sort of chibi Dr. Deng appears in my mind to hector me for this. “I...well, yeah! I don’t see why not. Only we’d need to be able to infer something about the egg that produced it.”

“I oughta be able to...” Yao muses. Prodding his rollscroll, he peruses the fingerprints of the debris we removed: spectra, and eigenvalues, and impulse responses — but never, I notice, an actual model of the debris itself. “I mean, I’d *better*, with my exam on Thursday...” He gradually falls silent, takes a long sip from his Tsingtao, and sighs.