Over email, and well into the early morning, Yao treats me to more theories on the source of the new debris. But turning them over, I find they all omit a key figure. It was inside Mbetethi Okeme’s mind that I had computed the inversion, and I try inserting him into Yao’s gradually more unhinged speculations to see how he fits. Had he stolen the egg from one of Suowei’s honeypots? Was he leaving it outside the Suowei Tower for their more gullible neikonauts to find? The rhythm of Mbetethi’s tiles buzzes into my half-sleep, and I wake from a frantic sense of trying to match them, to write loops and build monads in his logic. We *conversed* in there, I could be sure of it — or at least, he spoke to the part of me that had crossed into him via the Bridge. Maybe he explained the egg quite clearly in there. But whatever he said, it’s now lost to me across two yawning chasms — one between waking life and loop-lock, and another between myself and the diving-bell.

I arrive early to the clinic the next morning and make a beeline for the first scanner bay, looking for something overlooked. All through my unsleep, I saw it clearly in my mind’s eye. And — *nice* — it’s still here: Mbetethi’s N-1 lanyard, still dangling inconspicuously from a swivel chair. I pocket it and hang around, waiting for patients. It’s never more than a trickle, but the waiting room is never empty. Joining yesterday’s Big Three traders are employees of smaller firms, and even one or two of what Yao called “lone wolves”. He’s not in today. But unbelievably, Deng is.

After lunch, I find her preparing a Paracoin trader for loop-lock. For an uncooperative or unresponsive patient, this can be quite an ordeal — we have to recover their Kasibar calibration polynomials from what amount to full-bore magnetic depth charges. His impressive loadout of piercings is laid a safe distance away from the scanner head. *“Clear!”* shouts another clinician, and the display briefly lights up with a spider-map of his neikotic channels.

“You sorry sons of dogs!” shouts the man in the scanner. His eyes meet mine for a moment and I feel beheld, even grasped, by the madness behind them. “Do you have any idea who I work for?”

“He forgets where he is,” Dr. Deng explains dryly. “He thinks we’re trying to hotwire him.”

Every neikonaut ever to hold court in a booth at Double Descent claims to know a guy who was drugged, dragged, and sent into loop-lock, forced to execute some proprietary algorithm for nefarious ends. The perps vary: it might be a Taipei-trained splinter cell, or Chalkers, or just a jealous manager from down the hall. Verified reports are scarce, but this is why we don’t just carry our Kasibar coefficients on, like, a medical card.

The man in the scanner dry heaves, and I scramble for a trash can.

“So you did this with the prototype.” Once our patient is sedate, between the *bzzzzt* and the *zwoop*, Deng turns to face me with an inscrutable expression. I’d been waiting for the right time to explain all this to her, but she knew the whole story by the time I arrived.

“Last week,” I insist, by way of excuse. “Before —”

But she’s not indignant; merely surprised, and maybe, actually, impressed. “Well.” She exhales. “It’s more good than I ever did with it.”

*And that is that*, her tone suggests. A comfortable, businesslike silence descends between us, as we swab and soothe and stabilize one quantitative analyst after another. Only an hour later does she glance at some readouts for a moment, scrunch her nose, and declare, “it must be some kind of spectral sieve.”

“The egg?”

“The egg,” she confirms. I’m about to ask, *how could you possibly know that?* But I resolve to take up her challenge and, armed with the answer, scramble back down the trail of her reasoning. Another hour hence, our scanner’s overheated beamformer dies. She peeks through the doorway and cups her hands. “If you work for Suowei, Paracoin, or Chaoyue,” she shouts, “please seek treatment from your employer! We’ve put our inversion online, and your facilities are better than ours.”

Some stand to leave. Others stow their lanyards. *“Do you know who that is?”* whispers one trader to his frigidly unresponsive neighbor. *“That’s Adrianna Lam!”*