There is a commotion brewing outside the Dong’an metro station the next day as I’m heading to campus. Redlights and bluelights came to placate the crowd, but of course now they’re bickering with each other: a xiangsheng self-parody of relations between the wards and Blue Delta. The gate attendants look on haplessly from behind reinforced glass.

“They’re fucking with the ping again,” someone finally explains to me, waving their wallet app in my face. “It’s my mother-in-law’s birthday and they’re fucking with the ping.”

*They* are Suowei, Paracoin, and Chaoyue, the together-issuers of the parallel yuan. In Shanghai we call them the Big Three; up close, their relationship looks like an anvils-and-dynamite rivalry, which half-functions as checks and balances on the ping. But the rest of the world calls them *the trident.* From a distance they look fearsomely united, wielding Shanghai’s currency as a weapon. They de-pegged it from the Chinese yuan at the crack of dawn with a series of massive trades. Now its value is oscillating wildly. Every last drop of liquidity is in their firehoses. Unlubricated, the network of L2 chains governing ward entry tokens has ground to a halt. The subway gates aren’t letting anyone in or out.

“It looks like they’re going after Beijing,” speculates an auntie with a yoga mat under her arm and a fearsome, subscription-quality trader’s dashboard on her rollscroll. “They’re trying to reverse the peg.”

The *pingxingyuan,* the parallel yuan, has its value pegged to the regular yuan. It’s the Chinese economy’s parasitic, high-noon shadow. It slips into all the cracks in forex and treasuries and loans where China’s currency is supposed to go. It’s just a little more liquid, it settles just a little faster, its rates just a little lower. Same great taste, fewer calories: it does Shanghai’s bidding by staying well-behaved. But once in a while the Big Three go on offensive. Their massive trades are made of countless, tiny oscillations: they’ll be watching carefully to see which frequencies they can make the Chinese yuan vibrate at, and amplifying the instruments that carry those waves. The shadow is trying to make its master dance.

“Just let us onto the goddamn train,” shouts another one of my neighbors.

Eventually they do, and eventually I make it to YINS. The school is in rapture and classes are essentially cancelled. Shanghai’s best and brightest neikonauts are on the battlefield, stinging Beijing with trade after trade from loop-lock. Some students will be watching from a UTMS bed, hoping to glean subtleties of this financial warfare that elude us in soberspace. More of us are watching in darkened lecture halls. I slip into a back row. The boards are tuned to dazzling and incomprehensible visualizations of the trade flow. What I can say for sure is that Shanghai is blue and Beijing is red. But if you squint, and periodically hit your tryptamine pen, you can almost make out what’s happening.

Roundabout mid-afternoon, they pull it off. The e-sports commentators chattering from the sidescreens call it: the peg is reversed, wobbling, but reversed for now. A cheer goes up around me, if not from everyone. Beijing has neikonauts too, but it’s an open secret that they still send their best and brightest to YINS. They meet my gaze, a few of them: surely we all prefer our dogfights on this bloodless and silent new horizon. But there will be fighter pilots, neikonauts themselves, on elevated alert in Suzhou and in Beijing. In Sacramento and Washington they’ll be reading the wind for scraps of what’s happening. The loose joints of SHCA-MASA will flex: Beijing and Washington will find themselves on the same side of this — which, though no serious person in either place would ever admit, is kind of the point.

I’ve been entranced by this welcome distraction. It’s only in the evening that I stop to consider what it all implies. Onscreen I watch reporters hassling traders, panting and toweling off, as they exit the Suowei Tower. Their camballs buzz the upper floors, shot down, raining onto a terrified crowd. “Why today?” A streamer with a press pass shouts at a neikosuited Suowei employee. “What are you using?”

“It’s proprietary,” he replies, glowering.

Oh, shit.

But it isn’t proprietary, not any more. Late last evening it was posted on a storied neikotics forum, in the legendary *Open Eggs* thread: a .vxl file of a fairly simple golden orb. Now, this thread is legendary for a reason. Most of the eggs posted there are pranks or worse. Buttholes and cyanide capsules, or their neikotic equivalents, the immer-stuff of the anonymous web. But by now, many of the traders at the Big Three recognized this one. It circulated in secret over weeks past, this lethally precise spectral sieve. It was capable of reducing petabytes of rats-nest trading data to pure, simplified insight. They had a day, maybe, and then Beijing would have it too.

By sundown the peg is restored. Shanghai is clever, but Beijing is a giant, and they win these battles with torrential, three-gorges outflows of capital. Commentators still consider this a coup for Shanghai: you can do a lot of surgery on an economy with a two-hour causal incursion. China’s will run underclocked for a while, under diagnosis for snares and speed-bumps that Shanghai’s neikonauts have left behind.

“If we just had a Deng Bridge...” I hear one undergrad mutter to another, a Blue Delta pin on his lapel.

YINS turns its attention to the orb. The fab pumps out copies, and undergrads ponder them in threes and fours in warm-lit student lounges. I wander the halls, watching this play out in stupefied, muffled disbelief. Then the spell breaks. I make for the elevator and rush to the Neikotic Safety clinic. The entire staff seems to be downstairs. Yao is downstairs.

“The Sunflower Sieve,” he tells me, tossing me a copy of the neikotic egg. “That’s what they’re calling it.”

I have to feign a little surprise, inspecting the thing. But then again, I hardly caught a flash of it in Tethi’s hand the other night, moments before the commotion at Double Descent. *He must have dropped it*, I realize. He must be kicking himself. The orb is beautiful. It’s somewhere between transparent and translucent, doing something soft and inviting to light that I’ve never seen before, that I might have thought unphysical. *How? How is this possible?* The question is the gate to the garden path, and the answer is, precisely, the algorithm that the egg contains.

I consider the golden streaks bursting from the egg’s black and beady core. “It’s a good name.”

“No moving parts,” Yao mutters in admiration. He can’t take his eyes off it.

The Safety floor is preparing for a battle of its own. The clinic’s tryptamine cabinets are restocked, the EASL arrays shined and humming, the scanner beds disinfected. Some of our number are hatching the Sunflower Sieve egg, furtively, on some sure pretense. Dr. Rui is drafting memos about the damage we’ve already seen it do, urging caution, conjuring painful memories of Tenfold Gate. If Suowei and company are using the Sieve this way, their neikonauts surely won’t need to slink up to our clinic for the inversion. But this time tomorrow, everyone at YINS with neikotic channels will have tried it out.

In all of this, I realize, Deng is absent.

“Get ready,” Yao mutters gravely, gesturing for the egg back. “They’re coming.”