And she looks pleased to see me the next day, outside the faculty lounge. Pleased, I realize, to see my hands. She glances down at them, once, twice, with wry approval: “Did you manage it?”

“I think so.” I give it another moment’s thought. “I think I’ve got it down.”

My hands are covered with ink, because late last night and into the morning I was *whiteboarding*. I don’t have her mind for math, and I probably never will. And it’s been a long time since I’ve had to do any outside of loop-lock. I cursed Deng, as I factored and combined and plotted her equations, for not just giving me an egg to ponder. But that’s not how she operates. Even if she hadn’t sworn off loop-lock, she’ll always prefer ink on paper in soberspace.

The look she gives me is of a master claiming a novice, and I try not to imagine getting used to it. “Excellent,” she exclaims brightly, and leads me down a hallway. She opens a series of doors with her card. “Mona, this is the fun part. I think you’re really going to like this.”

The faculty isn’t hoarding the best scanners for themselves. Not really. They’re *breaking them in*, they insist between chuckles. *Working out the kinks.* Still, there’s nowhere on campus outside of the faculty lounge where you can use a late-model Kanwei Pulsar. The last door on the left is for a tiny scanner room, not really big enough for the both of us. It’s dimly lit, the suggestion of sunlight through dense conifers. Ambient music pulses quietly from the walls. And, god, the Pulsar! It has citrus-scented moisture-exchange padding where the clinic’s beds have sweat-stained foam. It has chrome-plated controls on the armrests. It has fucking teak accents, man, I dunno.

Deng watches my reaction with contained delight. “Kanwei claims they’ve nailed prose with the Pulsar. If you’re going to be writing, you should try it.”

Prose doesn’t mix so well with loop-lock. Writing in this way amounts to tiling in with a vague intention and letting the scanner rapidly probe your mind with a language model. It’s remarkably fast and eerily passive. Personally I doubt that Kanwei has *nailed* prose, but the Pulsar could hardly produce worse results than the first couple of papers I handed in written on student-center Gliders, five or six years old even back then.

“It might take a few tries, but I’m told it’s very fast. I’ll be waiting outside.”

So I close the door to the booth. A stillness descends, punctuated by the scanner’s clicks and beeps. I *do* know how to write this paper, I realize, looking at my blue-stained hands. Most of it will be the model’s doing, the guardrails of academic prose. But I can supply the rest. I have a mathematician’s sense, imperfect but immediate, of how my inversion works.

Even the visor smells nice. I paw at the shiny knobs, dialing in my settings, and then the Kanwei logo hovers in front of my eyes. *STAND BY FOR TILES.* The magnetized whine of the scanner encroaches and overtakes…

And I understand the Sunflower Sieve debris better, too. I understand it with textbook words like *pathological subdomain* and *measure-zero Kakei expansions.* It spills and twinkles from the negative space of Deng’s equations. I won’t think about that.

The nearly ultrasonic whine takes on even higher, tangy, citrus harmonics as an absolute wall of tangerine assails my eyes. The tryptamine hits: I feel a wave of intricate bliss, a vivid image of Deng smiling knowingly — the trip almost gets away from me before I can focus on the color, willing it to burst into four, and then again and again, primer tiles looping more than a hundred times a second, until I'm right on the verge of it. The sync is *crisp*, the colors bursting with skylike luminescence, the computer firmly but smoothly under my control, and I under its. The building blocks of my reality in loop-lock with the Pulsar are like a gemstone dust, almost fine enough to let real emotions swirl misty around me.

*I could get used to this,* I think. And then I’m back. There was the flashing, oscillating sensation of the language model scrubbing my channels. A blinding, rainbow-road prismatism. Now, just the sound of blood in my ears. Barely thirty seconds have passed, so little time that the DMT has only just peaked. I let the trip fade, birdsong made of bells made of birdsong, and then rise from the scanner to see just what it is that I’ve written.

{.mono.centered} **A Generalized Inversion for Sunflower Sieve Debris**  
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So far so good. Introduction, yadda yadda. Background and motivation, stop me if you’ve heard this before. All is well until about halfway down the second page.

{.tex} without the usual considerations of dimensionality (Fang). However, the Sieve’s unusual choice of pathological subdomain presents a second challenge: irregularly spaced attractors in the k-space of its debris that, when the Waldmann operator is applied to the binding graph by $W(B\_t, B\_{t + \epsilon})$, again produce elements of the pathological subdomain. We therefore consider the debris as a truncated warning that it’s coming, we all feel it and yet none of us can form the words to fence it in the tide $h\_T$ is too high and still rising ($v\_T’(t) >> 0$) and if any of us are to escape it will be in pieces

Ah. So much for Kanwei’s new prose models. I climb back into the scanner and try again, my head still throbbing from last time. This one’s better:

{.tex} introduce the notion of “smeared” seed sequences $\hat{B}\_t$ which are computed via a moving window deep below deck moving up and down. Are you feeling it (Lam et al.) the tension on the line the hook in your mouth the porthole convex. Known as hyperlagmites, these structures in the Mirror Sea

…until it’s not. I swig half a bottle of chilled water. On a heavy linen paper towel I put down Deng’s equations in cramped hand, steering my mind away from *all that*, towards dry and objective formalism. Take three:

{.tex} third case in which $B\_{t + \epsilon}$ has $\mu = 0$ we can choose arbitrarily whether the binding curve is concave ($k < 0$) or convex ($k > 0$) (Waldmann). Recovering this degree of freedom reveals runes unseen. The cardinality of $Z(B\_t)$ is deeper than you thought, but then you’ve already seen stolen sunlight twinkling on their edges you’ve been there you’ve been them it cannot (without loss of generality) be otherwise. It builds because it builds rises because it rises loops because it loops and it will overtake silent and silky the mirror sea will be the sea they crawled out of

I make myself delete this draft before I read any farther. It descends into shanzi, characters with no fixed meaning, radicals echoing with sinister suggestion. Whatever gnarled half-truth is trying to climb out of me and onto the page, reading it back is only going to make it worse.

Deng raps quietly on the door. “Are you all right in there?”

“I’m fine,” I shout back. Sweating now. Knowing that when I next walk through the cafeteria, I’m going to feel that debris hanging in midair, overflowing from the tiny crevices between word and gesture. I’m going to remember vividly how I saw it chattering silently in the Mirror Sea in just the same way. And the loop is going to tighten. The gap between here and there is going to feel like no space at all. Last time, with Cai by my side, I loved this feeling, loved it all too much. Now I climb into the scanner again and fire a massive magnetic charge into my channels, trying to burn it away.