I hatch the Sieve. It’s bizarre and otherworldly, sure, but really it’s straightforward as neikotic eggs go. Its amber mantle softens and bends light with a fibrous nest of tubules in the core, and their basic structure is the shadow of something more profound that I know will unfold in loop-lock. Tethi gave his customers thirty minutes to learn the thing in the darkness of Double Descent. Were there any real light down there, they could have done it in ten.

I return the egg to Yao’s desk, and I bring the Sieve into loop-lock. With each eye two inches from a screen, I force myself to hallucinate its secret patterns in the again-again staticky tile-shapes. In loop-lock, I don’t feel anything immediately.

Then the Sieve unfolds like an optical illusion. I notice that certain shapes I thought far in the distance are actually alarmingly close, and when I focus on moving them (for of course they are my own thoughts) I see how they articulate. I peel the machinery into the foreground, willing it to flex and bend, watching carefully how its pieces interact with each other, shocked at the size of the thing. Soon the ways it moves become apparent, its stiffnesses and affordances more familiar than the body reclining in the scanner chair.

If I had to describe it, and I guess I do, I would say I feel like a translucent, semirigid nest of millions of tubes ranging from the carotid to the capillary, like a pipe organ from the distant future. The bulk of my attention is not so much fixed on the Sieve as *is* the Sieve; but there’s enough of myself left over to admire it from all kinds of angles.

Then I look for some shit to put in it.

The thing about the Weather Bureau is that they really do still report the weather. From their servers I braid feeds from millions of sensors — temperature, pressure, humidity, wind, sunlight — from Chongming to Suzhou. This is the rawest data I can find, terabytes free of context or cleaning, and I spool it into the Sieve until I think I might burst. And as the Sieve churns, some of its pipes do burst. They go — ahem — *thoing!*  Overloaded arteries spill half-digested data into tilespace. *Thoing! Thoing! Thoing!* More than half of the tubules snap and wither. Ninety percent. Ninety-nine. In ingesting a year of weather readings, the Sieve has become a sparse yet highly predictive little snowglobe that says exactly when it’s going to rain. It sings with probability amplitudes tinged with petrichor.

It’s so good that you could easily ignore the neikotic debris spilling out of it by the megabyte.

I leave the Sieve behind, paging it to disk, and follow the debris as it sinks into the lower eta band. The loops are slower down here, the tiles darker. The debris is hard to spot: flaky distortions in tilespace, thousands of tiny jitters. I descend. *Focus. Oversample a single piece.* It’s barely ten tiles wide, quantized and comb-like, flitting rapidly. It collides with another piece. And another. Their eerily primitive snowflake-arms and cilia and corkscrews dazzle me with all the ways they fit together. The clumps become complex chunks of tile, reaching and darting with a microbial quickness. But as they reach a certain size, they converge towards that familiar coiling, meshing alphabet of shapes. Only now ten times larger...

I watch, astounded, as the golden flakes of the Sieve’s debris reassemble themselves, sticky and motile and almost velcro-like, into the same patterns at ever larger orders of magnitude. A single enormous piece emerges in the flurry. I dash and slosh around it, chasing good angles, watching the corkscrew-nautilus grab for another piece at its own giant scale. It scintillates frustratedly in place, too fast for the garbage collector to have a chance, heavy enough to hurt.

And it’s...reflective. Its outer layer flashes with the eta-band’s murky blue. It occurs to me that in loop-lock, things don't just reflect light. The reflection has to be computed, ray-traced. It takes tiles, cycles, time and energy to do this. *Why bother?* I draw closer, expanding its surface across my awareness, trying to untangle the pattern...

Suddenly, there’s a faint and discordant rumbling from even deeper in my tilespace. *You’ve really done it now, Mona.* With a flick of intention I collapse the Sieve and even more debris comes snowing down. I cast around, I realize, for a defensive weapon. I fashion myself into something wily and sharp. The rumbling grows into something orange and un-ignorable, into a buzzing. That’s when I realize, feeling faintly stupid, that someone is ringing the scanner booth’s doorbell. Poking the beehive.

“Yes?” I grumble, two minutes later. One of the Safety department’s undergrad researchers is at the door. She looks nervous — God, is this how they see me?

She explains. Which is to say that her mouth is moving, but just what I get from this is glimmering chatter, half-information, total nonsense. It enters through my ears but then seems to veer away from the language center of my brain.

“I’m sorry, *what?*”

She repeats herself slowly, those same mouth movements. I realize — and I don’t know how else to explain this — that I’ve been focusing in the wrong place entirely. There’s that sudden, tilt-shift effect again, and language snaps into focus. I arrive in time to catch the words *conference room* and *emergency meeting*. I don’t think I’ve blinked once.

She gives me a weird look. “Are you coming?”

“Yeah. Sorry.” I mess with my hair tie, and wipe sweat off my face. “Lead the way.”

The Sieve debris hurts like hell, for a minute. All those symptoms from the checklist — facial tics, golden light — those are real to me now. A micro-pixelated marimba-fountain with the metallic aftertaste of encryption burbles in my gut, and I worry that if I open my mouth again, something incomprehensible and yet legibly horrifying will come out.

Then I catch the eye of a neikonaut in the hall. I feel it, primarily, in my teeth: a millisecond of intricate tumbler-clicking. Emotionally I parse his look, the half-smile, as *you too, huh?* And then there’s a release of pressure, a reconfiguration, an expansion. My Sunflower Sieve debris interlocks with his and levels out, and suddenly it’s no more than ankle-deep. *Wait!* I want to shout at him, my language center back in the foreground. *What just happened?* But the moment is already long gone. I don’t think he noticed anything at all.

“What did you say this meeting was about?” I ask, sure that I’ve already been given the answer twice.

But she doesn’t seem to really know. “Something...I dunno, about the Sieve. They’re waiting for you.”

We turn a corner, and then another, and she lets me pry open the door.

“*Surprise,*” shouts the entire Neikotic Safety department. Someone blows on a noisemaker.