I see Cai again, but from a distance, from my seat in a middle row of the Observatory’s amphitheater. Weather Bureau tacticians and technicians of all stripes are packed in, taking assigned seats, sliding and unfolding rigid countertop tables from recesses in the floor. As they plug in their computers and adjust their headsets and shuffle their papers, the theater takes on the feeling of a mission control center. Which is exactly what this is. “Sunflower-I,” I mutter to no one in particular, retrieving the patch from my pocket. I catch the attention of a visored agent and wave the patch in her direction. “*Sunflower-I*,” I repeat, flooded with dull, dawning realization. She offers no response.

Cai appear from a side door. She and her teams receive three standing ovations, for Red Team, Blue Team, and Green Team. Ma Zhuming shakes all their hands, a ridiculous sight: him in his overlarge trench coat, the Bureau’s Ripplechasers in skintight violet-white zebra-stripes. Rui stands, arms folded, lips tight, but he offers Cai a few words of encouragement as she passes. Then they’re gone. Twelve of them, four to a veetle, shooting southwest across the river to begin their chase. We can watch through their eyes, watch them nervously watching each other. Cai has hers closed, her face in contortions, reciting something under her breath.

But the projection screen is dominated by a galactic, bird’s-eye view of the entire Mirror Sea. More of it than I have ever seen, its curvature obvious, the fractal logic of its wormways laid bare. Knowing what I know about Blue Delta’s alliances with the wards, we could be looking at thirty percent or more of the city’s cameras. There must be a whole floor of coprocessors, somewhere nearby, just to crunch the faintest outline of its true structure. It’s nighttime now in Shanghai, but in various corners of their massive composite, it’s morning or afternoon in the Sea. Ripples glint and glitter, flowing in and out of salience, practically microscopic at this scale. And in one area, no longer entirely contained, we see that onyx-and-gold sunflower latticework, sprouting from depths as yet unobserved.

“Sea-watch,” Ma barks theatrically, interrupting the low chatter and quick keystrokes of the Bureau’s dispatchers and cartographers. “Bogies?”

“Three,” calls a woman’s voice, a little coarse, vaguely familiar. It’s Yue Fang, who intercepted me outside the Observatory several weeks ago. She calls up some new projections, zoomed way in on three tiny purple-and-white blobs, flitting through three different vistas in the Sea. Diving-bells. *Diving-bells.*

“Four,” insists a colleague, male, who I don’t recognize. He sends up another viewport.

“Three.” And Yue Fang corrects him bluntly with little laser-pointer loops. “Numbers one and four are the same entity from two angles. See the aft banding?”

“Acknowledged,” Ma says. “Good. Doubles our chances. So where is it?”

“In one of the side lobes of the fifth major axial —”

“In *Shanghai*, Bo Yuan. We’ve got Ripplechasers waiting to land. Where can they go to see it?”

“It’s a hard question, Captain. Maybe nowhere. These blooms here look kind of like a department store...”

“Not good enough. Yue Fang?”

“This lobe is commonly associated with foot traffic in Tilanqiao and Zhapu. That’s not a guarantee.”

But it’s enough. There’s a dizzying, zooming reorientation as Sea-watch filters for cameras known to be in those two wards. What’s left is sparser and more homogenous, but also somehow richer in detail — now the coprocessors are focused on a smaller area, free to pick up deeper correlations. *“There!”* Five voices and three laser pointers catch the fringe of a diving-bell just as it flits out of sight. Sea-watch pulls cameras into and out of the braid, chasing its tail.

“Street team, we’re putting you down. Stand by for coordinates.” Ma is really hitting his stride now, waving a toothpick like a baton. The man looks like he’s been a few days from retirement for a very long time, and now I see why: he lives for this. “Get Zhapu on the line. Tell them we’re coming.”

And this is how it begins. Within minutes, we see high, shadowed towers of Zhapu Ward through twelve pairs of eyes. We see their neikotic manifolds, too, from headgear not unlike Tethi’s Introspecs. And we see a deep-ridged, glistening view from thousands of hashed camera feeds in their general vicinity. If you believe in any of this, these are all views into the same place at the fringes and incidentialities of our world, confined — for now — just out of common view. And it has to be said that the Weather Bureau does believe it. As much as your typical Ripplechaser, at least. Probably much as your typical Chalker.

*“If it’s happening in there...”* Ma raises his voice in incantation.

A robust chorus from the beating heart of the Bureau: *“It’s happening out here.”*

“Good. Let’s get to work.”