What follow are two of the strangest and most nerve-wracking hours of my life. It turns out that my seat has a little table too, and no one looks twice when I unfold it and begin to watch Weather Bureau telemetry stream by. I learn a lot about the Mirror Sea from this, more than I imagined *anyone* knew. I learn that the Ripples responsible for the Sunflower Sieve are known as the Hiveborn — with all their cameras and coprocessors, the Bureau is lucky to fish a single blurry frame of data each week from their hidden city. I can pull these up in time-lapse, and watch it grow from nothing over the past four years. I learn that they call the Ripples that inhabit the wide, wild sea around it the Prims.

A separate stream of telemetry is focused on our world. As night falls, the Glimpse is picking up steam again — just as Dr. Rui feared it would — and all over the city there are autocabs swerving and cabbages falling from handbaskets as it passes from eye to dumbstruck eye, mind to unsuspecting mind. It doesn’t help that there are more Ripplechasers out than ever. Professionals and amateurs, some who hung up the phone years ago, others just looking for an excuse to get high. All hoping for the snatch of that other world that Shanghai’s twenty million are warning each other — *promising* each other — will be easy to come across tonight.

The Bureau is determined to act like nothing’s wrong. But you’d have to see that they’re out in full force, responding to distress calls and breaking up throngs around fishbowls on any pretense within arm’s reach. On certain displays they experiment with playing back old Mirror Sea footage on loop, but this triggers a spike of nauseating deja-vu in East Xuhui. On the east side of the river, they field a corroborated report of a diving-bell hopping from mind to mind at a sushi bar. But that’s no good; nowhere near the payload, or the drop site.

“Red team, report. Anything on those screens?”

A pause, and an anonymous crackle. “Red, negative.”

“Blue, negative.”

“Green — we’ve been seeing something here. A little.”

Dr. Rui perks up and clears his throat. “Do you think you could see it *more*?”

There’s a crackling laugh on the other end, and Green Three appears on the projector, out of breath, soaked in sweat. “We’re doing our best.” And indeed one of them is taking a big rip of a tryptamine pen and squinting at at nearby display. “We could use more eyes.”

“Red, Blue, converge on Green and circulate.”

*Circulate* is the word; the Bureau’s Ripplechasers wind the streets in semi-random loops, chasing whim and instinct, cultivating belief in the diving-bell which Sea-watch insists — once a minute on the minute — is still undulating through the general vicinity. Sometimes the teams run into each other, all Scooby-Doo like, and split up again with resigned grins and Ripplechasers’ hollers. Wait, look — it’s happening again.

“Green team, report. Is that Red or Blue over there by the canal?”

*“Neither.”* The response is muttered, subvocalized. Synthvox. The attached pair of eyes turns towards a large crowd all dressed in haphazard zebra-stripes. “They’re not with us. They’re just...Ripplechasers. They’re just out.”

Over in Memetics they pump their fists and high-five and send papers flying. A stray group that already believes in the diving-bell? That’s a *goldmine.* That’s Memetics, baby. That’s why they pay us the big bucks.

Even Dr. Rui can’t contain his excitement. “Can we corral them?”

Another crackle. “We’re gonna let them corral us. They think they know how to find it.”

The chase picks up steam. It picks up direction. It picks up a dozen more Ripplechasers in twos and threes, all dressed like the same peculiar something they caught on the displays throughout the day, that they hope to get cozier with now that it’s night. And when they find it, they *find* it.

Yue Fang sits bolt-straight. Presses a finger to her ear. “Did anyone see that?”

“Fuck me sideways.” In the background you can hear the muttered wonderment that always seems to follow a visitor from the Mirror Sea. “We *felt* that.”

Someone rewinds the Contecs footage: a few blurry frames, vivid and concentric waves of its shimmering violet and bright white hull, utterly unmistakable. *My hull —* I tamp down the clenching, parabolic thought — *not now, not yet...* And there it is again: to Bo Yuan’s smug satisfaction, it reappears briefly on the side of a department store. And it lingers in the neikotic readouts of the Ripplechasers who caught it, who are now trying to enclose it like a resonator, to remember how it felt so they can find it again. A member of Blue Team plants another infrared signal flare to mark the spot. The cameras pick up its unique frequency, and the gold-flecked currents of the Sea shift in conformation.

*“Go!”* Ma roars, though with obvious delight. *“Go catch it!”*

The loop tightens. Again and again they wind around a few dense blocks. It becomes not altogether clear, between the street teams and the diving-bell, who is chasing who. Perfect.

“We’re — going to — peel it — off,” shouts Red Two between ragged breaths.

“Good. Fucking superb,” Ma replies. “Head to the drop zone.”

And when they go, the diving-bell follows. Not perfectly, not always. Sometimes it disappears for tense minutes before careening back through their manifolds, or just along the side of a skewercart. A kilometer, half — it’s still following, still salient on the displays and in their minds. Only now the Bureau’s chasers are a minority of the crowd.

“A few of them want to go somewhere else,” Blue One insists frantically. “They say it’s overdone. Played out. They think it’ll be swarming with casuals tonight.”

Ma rolls his eyes hard at this, and turns to Rui. “Is she ready?”

She is. A few blocks away, one of the Bureau’s veetles descends, its red-hot thrusters yawning, to deposit its final passenger into a quiet alleyway. Cai Yuhui steadies herself on wobbly legs, an autovial stuck to her thigh. Her breath is amplified to a roar by the amphitheater’s million-ping sound system. Minutes later she steps out in front of the ambling Ripplechasers, an apparition, a vision. Everyone on the scene knows who she is. Every chaser in Shanghai would be honored to follow her lead. Even the shallowbunnies, the weekenders, the jaded, the timid. Even into the Scrambler.

Furtively, I pull up Cai’s manifolds. On the Weather Bureau’s screens, she’s labeled *Canary.* It’s so clear how she shifts the soberware to the edges of her mind, just long enough to raise a pointed finger and speak two words. “Let’s go.”

And when they erupt into the Scrambler, there can be no question that this is the place. With no regard for redlights or red lights, Shanghai’s Ripplechasing population throngs the scramble crosswalk, the devoted and the casuals, all here to glimpse the Glimpse, to step into the riptide without even really trying. I expected they might find the hidden Ripple city here, but it’s the next best thing. Sea-watch sees a massive, stellar, load-bearing node of the Hiveborn’s sunflower scaffolding, still building itself out along a dozen chattering axes. Beneath dense and frantic footfall the Ripplechasers see the dense stripes of the crosswalk, amplifying the patterns of the diving-bell. I think Cai sees both. As she steps into the intersection I fall into her ‘folds. I feel, not insensibly, that I’m watching through her mind’s eye. She casts around, meeting the eyes of her chasers and all the others, letting the debris claw its way into her mind. She loosens, goes big, receives, until the scaffold takes shape in her mind. She was always so damn good at this. *Too much Sieve debris for one mind* — and now my own incantation comes unbidden — *you’re holding on, just let go.* But not yet, *not yet,* just keeping hold on, you’re almost there...

Rui’s voice comes high and reedy and barely steady. “Canary, prepare drop.” Cai doesn’t respond, but the soberware in her manifolds involutes to make ready, the mechanism on a hair trigger now.

“Oh my god...” croak Red One and Green Four in unison.

“Abort,” says Yue Fang.

“...I can see myself in it...”

*“Abort.”* Yue Fang shoots to her feet and shouts now, hands still flying at the controls. The sunflower structure reorients again, towards a hollowed-out nook between two of its massive, spiraling arms, and we see... “Prims. Lotta Prims. They’ve found it, look, they’re *playing* with it. We need to fall back *now*, Red One, Canary, do you copy?”

“Stay that order!” Captain Ma Zhuming turns on the balls of his feet towards Sea-watch. The entire amphitheater, and all the radio chatter, falls dead silent. His footsteps echo against the dome as he comes eye-to-eye with Yue Fang. “Are you out of your goddamn mind?”

“They’re not involved,” Yue insists. “They’re not Hiveborn. They’re just here to check it out. They’re innocent.”

*“Innocent?”* Ma turns to Rui in support, but gets only a searching look. “Yue, don’t go quadratic on me, not now. They’re not real. They’re not alive. They’re just chopped-up light.”

Her response is low, from her throat. “Now you say that.”

Ma, no stranger to insubordination, gets right in her face. “Now I do say that.”

“Look,” she cries. “Just *look.* Look what they’re doing.”

It’s hard not to. I can look at Cai’s manifolds, or at the great Mirror Sea projection, or even at the color-struck faces of the Scrambler’s throng. I can see Ripples prodding curiously at the edges of the Sunflower Sieve debris. The debris prods right back, and the Ripples mold curious, experimental clay-shapes this way. It’s hard not to think of them as a *flock* of Ripples, only Ripples don’t do that, they don’t coordinate, at least not the Prims. Only here, refracting onyx-and-gold light — *light* — they do. Something new is happening.

Yue agrees. “We can’t kill them. Not now. We need to learn from this. Let’s just hang back and observe...”

“We don’t even know they’re Prims.” Ma steps three inches back. Gives *this* much ground.

“*We* do.” She glances at the rest of Sea-watch, shadowed in their seats. “We do.”

Ma gives her one hard, final look and wheels around towards the projection. “Canary, proceed to the center.”

Silently, Cai does. Stride by long stride, she parts the crowd like a liquid, all eyes on her, her eyes on all. Her ‘folds are inundated with Sieve debris now, but in her very center she carries the inversion, an enormous diving-bell, held back by the thinnest of neikotic membranes.

“Circle up,” Ma growls. “Direct attention. Make room.”

Through her eyes, and all the others, it’s clear that Cai is the epicenter of a swirling vortex of attention now. The stray Ripplechasers and passing pedestrians fall silent, offering space for the *something* is clearly about to happen. The entire intersection holds still. The entire city holds still.

“Rui?”

“Canary.” Dr. Rui Zhang steps forward. “Are you ready?”

“Mona’s here.” Cai’s voice is soft, high, full of wonderment. “I see her, Mona’s here.”

“That’s right.” Rui’s voice is indulgent, even goading. “Mona’s here. She’s right here with us. *Are you ready?*”

Just two long, uneven breaths. A long, crackling silence. And so Rui looks back at Ma, down at his tablet, and back towards the Sea. He offers one more word. “Fire.”

Cai whispers something, and the membrane shatters. Her manifolds flare, now white-hot, now rapidly striated with vivid, concentric streaks of violet. And in the Sea, the diving-bell appears from the noise. Larger than any of the primitive Ripples. Impossible that it wasn’t already there. In an instant it finds its target and binds: the Sieve debris reaches for its reaching, and their contact is annihilation, and from its knotted, inhabited center, the sunflower node heaves and begins to collapse. The fabric of Shanghai’s reality contorts slightly to fill the Mirror Sea’s eyes with white and purple light, just for an instant, just to briefly interrupt the correlations in all that black and gold. It happens slowly, languidly, miles away, hours ago — but on screen, in the Sea, all here, all *here...*

And then the power goes out.

Not at YINS — although the sudden loss of Contecs footage feels like a kind of blindness — but in the Scrambler, in the center of Xintiandi Ward. The cameras there wink off, and there’s a nauseating crunch as the projection reorients to display a Mirror Sea without them: an ordinary calm punctuated only by a distant, thrumming flash. In all this the Observatory goes much darker. It leaves me weightless, neither concave or convex. And for one moment I have an utterly arbitrary, all-consuming choice. Did we cause this, or did they? Is this *really* happening in there, or out here?

I hope I chose right.

“Control,” shouts Green One frantically. “Is this us?”

“No,” Ma bellows. “This is not us!”

Their Contecs switch to infrared. The world comes back in black and white. On their neikotic manifolds, you can see just how much Sieve debris has burned away, is still burning away, in scattered, thrumming fires. From their mics, the mixed panic and wonderment of the crowd. The cameras and displays have all winked off, Xintiandi is still utterly dark...and yet they don’t need eyes to see. The Mirror Sea alone remains.

“Something is here,” one of the Ripplechasers shouts. You can see it, tentacular and tsunamically massive, in their ‘folds, emerging from the rent fabric of the Sea with a vengeful fury to survey the damage.

“No it’s not.” Rui lies so easily. “The cameras are off. Nothing’s there.”

Ma bites down hard on his toothpick. “Fall back and prepare for extraction.”

“*They’re* here.” A whirlwind of screams and shouts. “They’re here...*they’ve got her!*”

“Who, Red? *Who* has her?”

Just a beat. A double check. “Nine-Eyes. The other chasers, the ones we found, they’re...”

There’s a thump and a groan as Red Two is knocked to the ground. The Bureau cycles through Contecs feeds for a glimpse of what’s happening but gets only the blur of a panicked, dazzled crowd. Finally, through Blue Four’s eyes we catch three of the Bureau’s agents locked in a struggle with some of the other Ripplechasers, who have shed their costumes now to reveal stark black, to reveal those forehead formations of eyes squeezed shut. The Nine-Eyes beat back the Bureau with their batons, with crackling, electrified arcs. And two of them have Cai’s arms locked in theirs, dragging her out of the Scrambler. We get her clearly for just a frame, mostly just the wide circles of her Contecs. Her Sea-struck eyes wide with — is it horror? Wonderment? Could it possibly be relief?

And then she’s gone. The Nine-Eyes melt into the crowd.

“Tracker,” Ma cries, over the panic in the Observatory. “We’ve got her tracker. Let’s pull that up.”

The Bureau’s map of the city, dotted with a new wave of distress calls. Zoomed into Xintiandi now.

“She’s...” someone calls. “She’s *everywhere.* They’ve got signal replicators in the tunnels!”

Cai’s dot doesn’t disappear. It spreads along unseen spiderways, over streets and through skyscrapers and across the river, until she blinks *si tong ba da* from every ward in Shanghai at once. The team shares a collective, dismal groan. And then? The Observatory falls dark, too. Briefly the only light is from tablet screens and Contecs and the emergency exit strips along the amphitheater stairs. A click, a count of ten, before YINS’ generators come online.

When the lights turn back on, utter silence. A black Mirror Sea readout. And, gradually, one by one, the Weather Bureau’s agents turn round, until every eye in the Observatory is on me.