

Anomaly  
by  
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(Excerpt)

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WRITER'S NOTE:

THIS IS A MIXED LANGUAGE FILM.

In the Shuntian/U-CAT environment, Mandarin and English are both primary languages - residents of those areas switch seamlessly between the two, and all signs are in both languages. Kind of like Hong Kong - but with Mandarin and more English.

In The Valley and beyond, English is primarily used. For the viewer, subtitles will appear where appropriate, depending on the context and characters.

I have chosen to avoid telegraphing the language shifts so the reader can focus on the story.

EXT. A SNOWY MOUNTAIN RIDGE - NIGHT

Under a crisp and star-choked sky, a full moon illuminates a bare, rock-and-snow ridge.

TWO FIGURES in mountaineering clothing ascend upward with makeshift crampons and axes, their breath visible in the air. They reach the ridge and look over a steep drop onto a vast valley.

They stop, panting in the thin air, tired but relieved. The lights of civilization dot the plain before them.

One of them turns to look back the way they came and sees:

Another valley, barren - almost pitch-black. The only lights are from a clumped-together town, way in the distance.

A sound from below, on the lush side of the ridge. They look at each other: *Do you hear that?* The sound builds into a slow whirrrrr...louder....then:

An EXPLOSION of light, blinding them. It dims slightly to reveal hundreds of tiny drones hovering in front of them, 20 feet away. The eerie whir remains deafening - they stand stock still as the lights scan their bodies.

A VOICE (BORED GUARD) sounds from the drones.

BORED GUARD (O.C.)  
Guys, c'mon. This never works..

They remain frozen in fear as the lights blind them..

INT. BORDER PATROL STATION - NIGHT

A small, bunker-like security center. Two guards - the veteran BORED GUARD, and a ROOKIE GUARD, fresh-faced - monitor an array of screens. On their shoulders are patches that read "C.A.B."

The two climbers are on the screens, illuminated on the top of the ridge. VERY exposed. On the screen, one climber looks to his right...

...Then he BOLTS down the ridge, running as well as he can in snow-choked crampons at altitude.

His companion gapes in frozen terror.

INT. BORDER PATROL STATION - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

BORED GUARD  
 (sighing, to Rookie Guard)  
 Fire a warning.

Rookie Guard stares at the screen, but hesitates...

Then, as he furrows his brow, a shot bolts out from the drone.

On the screen, the shot goes into the steep ground under the climber - but the rock crumbles: The climber turns and tries to grab at snow and rock, crampons skittering in futility against the scorched rock face.

The other climber snaps out of his trance and pounces forward to help... but no.

The man falls with the broken rock, his muffled yell silenced as he bounces off the steep cliff and disappears into the darkness.

On the screen, the remaining climber - a muddle of grief and terror - scrambles and disappears back over the ridge. A stifled silence settles.

Rookie Guard is ashen-faced...

BORED GUARD (cont'd)  
 Ain't your fault, kid. He shouldn't  
 a' run. Especially so close to the  
 edge there.

He turns to an empty part of the desk - a screen materializes in front of him, with a form on it.

Header: "UCAT BORDER SECURITY - INCIDENT REPORT"

He grabs two joysticks with finger-sensors on them and starts "typing."

EXT. A SNOWY MOUNTAIN RIDGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

On the ridge, the lights from the drones fade out..

FADE TO:

EXT. SHUNTIAN - DAY

A lush, beautiful metropolitan area that sits nestled in the mountains on a gorgeous bay.

INT. LIA'S HOME - SHUNTIAN - DAY

MAYA, ten-months old, with slight Asian features, dark-ish skin, and cute as they come at that age, sits on the floor of a sleek living room, surrounded by several gauges and screens that float in the air.

On one of them is a display of a live farm. She laughs and points, looking up at someone.

MAYA  
(pointing to the display)  
Moo!

LIA (O.S.)  
That's right!

LIA POWELL, early-30's, confident and strong - a 50/50 blend of Asian and Caucasian - sits at a bar stool in the beautiful kitchen area.

She's drinking coffee and watching a NEWS REPORT that hovers in front of her: Drone's-eye b-roll of the mountainous area playing under a lower-third:

"Terrorist Killed Trying to Enter Shuntian."

Her view is interrupted by an "INCOMING CALL" alert:

PLEASANT VOICE  
(from the screen)  
You have blocked Robert Lin and he  
is leaving a message. Say 'answer'  
to interrupt.

Lia stares at it, suddenly tense...then: ROBERT LIN's face - handsome, middle-aged, groomed - appears as he leaves a message.

ROBERT  
(hovering in Lia's field  
of view)  
So I imagine you're ignoring me.  
Don't know if you saw the news but  
everyone's asking for a statement  
and I just wanted to get your,  
uh...input before I say anything.  
Hope that's OK...

She watches his face blink out of existence, takes a breath, then stands up and gathers her things.

Nearby, ADELE - a YOUNG NANNY - wipes the counter and puts dishes away.

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LIA  
I'm leaving, Dell.

ADELE  
Is there anything else you need?

LIA  
No, thanks. You feeling good?

In reply, Adele displays a series of tiny gauges in Lia's field of view: hunger, thirst, energy, brain, etc...too many to see in one viewing. All are full.

LIA (cont'd)  
Take her to the park today, would you?

ADELE  
Of course.

Adele stands and moves toward the baby. There's not a trace of android about her.

Lia picks up Maya and tries to kiss her, but Maya squirms, wanting to go back to the farm.

LIA  
OK, fine..

Lia puts her down and heads out.

FADE TO:

EXT. SHUNTIAN TRAIN STATION - DAY

The skyscrapers of the city gleam in the distance as Lia stands with other commuters on the open-air platform of a beautiful rail station, all polished and shiny.

The platform edge bumps up against a thick, translucent tube, covering a single rail. On a wall of the station, a holographic billboard plays an animated ad:

A picture of a happy, wealthy citizen, next to a picture of a dirty, slightly-darker-skinned person:

"AVOID TRAVEL TO THE VALLEY," says the caption in an ominous font, in both Mandarin and English.

The Magnetic Levitation train arrives, "floating" above the tracks, inside the tube. It settles down and the tube recedes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lia moves in and finds a seat. The tube spirals back up and over, and after a beat, the mag-lev train rises and shoots off in the tube, toward the gleaming skyscrapers.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

If Apple designed a commuter train, this would be it.

Lia sits in the full-but-spacious car, looking around at the well-dressed people. Most stare straight ahead, seeing things only they can see, oblivious to anything around them.

Several other people talk quietly to themselves, engrossed in a seemingly one-sided conversation.

Lia looks up at a moving ad touting the revolutionary safety features of The Phone3:

"The Phone3. Safe. Secure. Yours." Smiling people with their heads-up-displays - laughing, drinking, having fun. Lia watches it, put off by the earnestness. She turns her attention to her fellow passengers.

As she scans the faces, her HEADS-UP-DISPLAY (HUD) appears. A list of commands scans past her vision and she settles on one:

"PRIMARY 5 ACCESS: USER DIAGNOSTICS"

...as one-by-one each person's face gets highlighted...with their name, address, number, etc, appearing beside them. She looks at every person's face - specifically checking the "VERSION CHECK," which is highlighted next to each head in Lia's view.

With one exception - that of a STOOPED OLD MAN - all versions are "3.0"

Lia sits back in satisfaction as the info disappears. Then: her Phone rings again...she sees the INCOMING CALL alert:

Robert Lin. Again, she ignores it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JON'S APARTMENT - TIANGUAN - DAY

In a small, old-but-tidy apartment, an alarm clock - Radio Shack ca. 1978 - emits a piercing buzz.

A hand hits it and withdraws, then a body moves out of the bed next to the clock.

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JON KESHER - early 30's, Middle-Eastern, with shaded features and a fiery face - arises from a deep sleep. He does not want to go to work today.

Shirtless, his body weathered by manual labor, he stands up and walks through the small space. In the spartan kitchenette, he opens a mostly-empty cabinet and pulls out some dog food.

JON  
(emptying it into a dish)  
Leila!

The excited rattle of a collar-tag sounds as an undersized Bernese Mountain Dog comes bounding from under the bed to the food.

Jon goes to the small, standalone shower - next to the kitchenette - and turns it on.

EXT. JON'S APARTMENT - TIANGUAN - DAY

Jon exits his apartment building - a tidy housing project - and walks down the clean but cramped streets of Tianguan.

He rounds a corner and finds TWO GUARDS picking up a PASSED OUT HOMELESS PERSON. The guards are methodical and silent as they clear the man from the street.

Jon ignores it and heads toward an overground subway station and a sign marked "TRAM."

INT. TRAIN - THE VALLEY

In an older-model magnetic-levitation train - as run-down as the other was sleek - Jon sits among other shabby, worker-looking people. A melting pot of races and ethnicities, all tired and worn.

Some read newspapers, others listen to small cassette-like music players. Jon reads a news ticker that runs along the train's wall:

IMMIGRANT WORKER DIES IN FALL TRYING TO SNEAK INTO SHUNTIAN

He grimaces and shakes his head.

Across from him sits SHEN KUO, Chinese, 50-ish but ageless, with sharp features and paradoxically blue eyes. He stares at Jon, unnoticed.

The train pulls into another stop and a crowd shuffles on.

(CONTINUED)



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Jon scans the faces and then sees DONOVAN, 45 and big. They lock eyes and Donovan pushes through toward him.

DONOVAN  
Mornin'.

JON  
Yeah.

DONOVAN  
Where were you last night? We went out.

JON  
I went climbing.

DONOVAN  
Damn man, in the *dark*?

JON  
One of the miners snagged me a headlamp. It worked well enough.

DONOVAN  
You gonna kill yourself with that someday.

Jon shrugs and looks at the ticker, giving details of the border incident.

JON  
You believe that? They killed another one.

DONOVAN  
Says he fell.

JON  
Oh sure.

DONOVAN  
Well, guys can't be trying to sneak over the border, ya know?

No response as Jon idly looks around the train. His eyes land on Shen, who locks his gaze...

Then: Jon's face grimaces as his vision goes...funny...

Random images FLASH in front of him, visible only to him: a vast plain...a small town...an Irish Pub on a dark street - quick snippets, gone as soon as they appear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He shakes his head to clear the images, and they disappear in an instant. He looks over at Shen, who sits, eyes down, calm and disinterested.

DONOVAN (cont'd)  
 (noticing)  
 Yo, you OK?

JON  
 (swimmy)  
 Yeah. Just...should've slept more,  
 ya know?

Shen subtly lifts his eyes up as Jon tries to put the sensation out of his head.

INT. THINC HEADQUARTERS - MONITORING LAB

PRIYA - 22, dark-skinned and calm - and DAMIAN - her non-identical "twin," wonky and neurotic - sit at workstations, in emergency mode.

In front of them looms a giant, holographic map of the region, overlaid with swirls of color representing internet activity.

The landmass is recognizable as the Northwestern quadrant of North America. Every square mile of land in the entire country is labeled and monitored.

One region in particular - about where Calgary is today - is labeled "Tianguan." Right now it's obscured by a big, red swirl.

Damian "types" at a virtual display - both hands motioning over a panel. He's a little frantic.

Suddenly: the dot retreats, leaving a normal activity reading - almost non-existent.

Damian pauses: *What the...?*

DAMIAN  
 How is that even possible?

PRIYA  
 (neutral)  
 It's not.

DAMIAN  
 Should we call Lia?

Priya nods.

EXT. SHUNTIAN STREET - DAY

Establishing. Lia walks with purpose down the pristine, bustling street.

Around her are lovely shops and cafes, filled with well-kept people, all immersed in their own worlds.

She walks up to the grand lobby entrance of SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL.

INT. SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL

In the beautiful foyer, she stops and takes a look around - in her view, a holographic directory appears with instructions. It slowly grows into a map of the entire hospital.

Then, the map speaks to her:

HELPFUL VOICE (V.O.)  
Good morning, Lia. Room 3204,  
elevators to your right.

Lia turns toward the elevators and the hologram disappears.

INT. SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL - MATERNITY WARD

Lia walks off the elevator and heads toward a holographic arrow: "3204 THIS WAY"

Just then - her field of view is filled by an alert:

"PRIYA IS CALLING"

Lia moves off to the side and sits on a window sill, then speaks.

LIA  
Hey, I'm on my way in, just making  
a quick stop. What's up?

INTERCUT with Priya in the Lab:

PRIYA  
Sorry to bother you, but we've had  
some weird activity in Tianguan.

LIA  
Did you get an address?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRIYA

There kind of...*isn't* one...

In her view appears a replay of what Priya and Damian saw. She examines it.

LIA

That's gotta be an error. You sure it's not a monitor glitch?

PRIYA

Yeah.

LIA

But it's gone now?

DAMIAN (O.C.)

Yes.

LIA

Ok, I'll be in soon.

The "call" disconnects. The arrow toward room 3204 appears again and she follows it.

INT. SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL - ROSE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She pokes her head in and smiles:

In the spacious room, ROSE MONROE, 28, sits in bed, holding a newborn. Rose smiles back when she sees Lia.

ROSE

Hi!!

LIA

(barely containing her  
happiness)

Oh, let me see him...

Lia heads over and fawns over the newborn, picking him up with care.

LIA (cont'd)

I miss this age...they're so  
LITTLE! He's getting his phone  
today right?

ROSE

Yeah.

LIA

Wait, are you nervous?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSE

Well yeah.. of course.

LIA

There's no reason to be, you know that.

ROSE

I just keep hearing these horror stories of bad hardware causing disabilities..

LIA

But that's like, point-oh-two percent of the population. Think about how many they do per day, you know? Are you getting the upgrade?

ROSE

I don't think so.

LIA

Aww...why?

ROSE

(hiding her irritation)

It's expensive, Lia. We don't all work for Thinc.

Lia's face drops in guilt, but they are interrupted by the arrival of DR. BRAND and a NICE ASSISTANT.

DR. BRAND

Hello there, and how are we today?  
All ready?

Nice Assistant reaches out for the baby and Lia hands him over.

DR. BRAND (cont'd)

We're going to take him to prep, but while I'm gone I'd like you to watch this short primer on the implant and your options, mmm'k?

ROSE

Sure.

DR. BRAND

(pointing at a blank spot  
in the wall)

Just take a look over there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He and the Nice Assistant leave with the sleeping infant. A holographic video appears in front of the spot on the wall.

LIA

Oh this...this is terrible.

They settle back to watch:

It's a well-produced and cheesy infomercial, welcoming us to the world of life with a Phone. Soothing, inspirational music plays as an AFFECTED NARRATOR appears and addresses Rose.

AFFECTED NARRATOR (V.O.)

Hello Rose. Congratulations on the birth of your son, and welcome to the bliss and joy of our parenting network..

Lia rolls her eyes at Rose..

AFFECTED NARRATOR (V.O.) (cont'd)

Since this is your first child, there are several things you should be aware of regarding the Nano-Biophonetic Implant, by TransHumanics Incorporated. What you know of as a "Phone."

A holographic child appears, cradled by beautiful hands. The hands gently place the baby onto what looks like an MRI table, which then slides into a small chamber...

AFFECTED NARRATOR (V.O.) (cont'd)

Your child will be placed into our state-of-the-art e-HANCEment chamber, where the surgical team will get a map of his current brain structure...

A call comes in to Lia.

PLEASANT VOICE

(from Lia's screen)

You have blocked Robert Lin and he is leaving a message. Say 'answer' to interrupt.

With a sigh, Lia stands.

LIA

(to Rose)

I have to get this, I'll be right back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She steps out of the room as Rose continues watching...

INT. SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Steeling herself, Lia moves into the hallway and accepts the call.

Robert's image appears, hovering in front of her.

LIA  
(launching into it)  
The guys from the border were not  
from the Unknown. Unknown wouldn't  
be so stupid. OK?

ROBERT  
Oh, hello to you too.

LIA  
I'm busy Robert. I can't be your  
adviser.

ROBERT  
OK, OK...sorry. I just...I don't  
know - the press is always wanting  
me to say *something*...

LIA  
Yeah it's not like you're the Vice  
Premier or anything...Is there  
anything else?

Robert pauses, trying to decide whether or not to continue.

ROBERT  
How's Maya?

LIA  
Don't start with that...

ROBERT  
I'm sorry Lia - you know how I  
feel. You're gone a lot.

Lia pushes herself into a corner, trying to avoid making a scene. Robert's hovering face moves with her..

LIA  
Listen very carefully: She is NOT  
YOUR DAUGHTER!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERT

See, this is what I'm talking about. I'm just trying to help, and you just *reject* it. Always *rejecting*.

LIA

Well *sometimes* people just *demand* to be rejected.

ROBERT

No, you're just STUBBORN, Lia. You're immature. And you need to understand, I'm just concerned about it. I mean, you can attack *me* all you want, but I'm not the one who got raped and pregnant and had to come crawling back.

Lia's face drops in shock, and the sting of tears comes unbidden.

Robert realizes he went too far.

ROBERT (cont'd)

(true remorse)

I'm sorry - I didn't mean that..

Lia stares at him..

ROBERT (cont'd)

Lia, please...don't hang up on me...

His image disappears. Lia catches her breath - then remembers:

INT. AN UNDERGROUND BUNKER - NIGHT

TITLE: "TWO YEARS BEFORE"

Lia's eyes flutter open...a nasty gash runs down the side of her face.

She wakes up as the world comes into focus. VOICES SOUND nearby...[OLLIE and CLAUDE]

CLAUDE (O.S.)

...I mean, what the hell were you thinking?!?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Lia sits up, suddenly alert...she's in a SMALL ROOM, on a hard couch. Then the pain hits: she grasps her abdomen and doubles over, forcing herself to focus.

The voices come in from the other side of the only door.

OLLIE (O.S.)

You weren't there. She was saying all sorts of stuff about leaving and going home...I should have killed her.

CLAUDE (O.S.)

Dude, they would have killed YOU! You now how important she is? What are we gonna do?

Lia looks around, frantic... She's in pain, but she fights it and tries to plan an escape. The conversation outside continues.

OLLIE

We need to move her back to her bed - even if she remembers anything, we can just... We'll say she drank too much or something... He'll back us up. He doesn't want anyone to find out either.

CLAUDE

Fine, come on. Before she wakes up.

Lia realizes they're about to come in the room...she spots something and moves quickly.

The door opens. CLAUDE, mid 20's and slight and OLLIE, same age but much larger - enter...and see an empty couch.

Both men have small wires running into their heads from a tiny device that sits behind their ears.

CLAUDE (cont'd)

What the...where is sh....?

But he's cut off by a swift kick in his face.

Claude drops as Lia comes out from behind the door and quickly pulls the wire out of his device. He instantly loses consciousness.

OLLIE

Jesus! What's wrong with you?? We want to HELP!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LIA  
(bitter)  
Oh, is that what that was?

OLLIE  
Come on - you were sounding nuts! I just wanted to protect you from the rest of them. It's not like we're not together, you know?...I mean..I didn't mean to hurt you..why did you resist so m...??

But Lia doesn't let him finish. Her attack is swift, catching Ollie off-guard.

He fights back, gaining the advantage quickly..but just as Lia's about to be overpowered, she ducks a punch, rolls backward and shuts her eyes, concentrating.

Ollie is STOPPED, frozen - his eyes lock in terror.

Suddenly, he turns around, swatting at imaginary things.

Lia runs out the door, leaving Ollie to fight whatever terrors she uploaded into his imagination.

NICE ASSISTANT (O.S.)  
Excuse me...?

BACK TO:

INT. SHUNTIAN CENTRAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Lia is jolted from the memory: A NICE ORDERLY stands nearby, concerned.

NICE ORDERLY  
Excuse me... Are you OK?

Lia looks up - she realizes she's huddled in a corner. Quickly regaining her composure:

LIA  
Yes, yeah. I'm fine - thanks. Just, tired today. You know...

Lia then notices the blankish stare...and the small blinking light under his ear.

NICE ORDERLY  
No, I'm not sure I do. But I am able to understand. I'm glad you're well.

(CONTINUED)