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The Chronicles of a Lost People

A novella exploring the dangers of digital surveillance and the Chinese Social Credit System

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In a state of total surveillance where there remained no plausibility of privacy, where human interference was no longer needed, and where a spy system existed that was so complex it encased every single household, what form of undetected resistance could even hope to exist?
- Atreus Crane, Dealing with Dissent

totalitarianism

digital surveillance

lack of privacy

repression

Progress without ethics is tyranny. In the age of AI and rapid technology advancements dangers to our freedom and democracy remain largely overlooked or even ridiculed. We are willing to turn a blind eye to lacking data protection and infringements of our privacy in the name of comfort and a perceived sense of safety. The Chronicles of a Lost People is a dystopian novella showcasing the dangers of AI and digital surveillance. Inspired by the Chinese Social Credit System's pilot projects, it explores how modern-day digital totalitarianism could look like and most importantly the toll a lack of privacy and freedom has on those subjected to it.

isolation

psychological anguish

„I miss the time when I felt safe, when I was un-watched and could truly be alone.

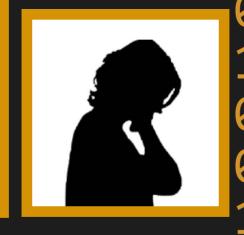But I am safe, I tell myself. Why wouldn't I be?

It's like a mantra, repeated over and over again in my head along with all the others, like Keep smiling. Keep quiet. They are watching."
- Isolde Nightingale, The Silent Observer

Research:

"Write what you know." - Mark Twain

Researching the Chinese Social Credit System (SCS) proved difficult. Most Western sources, especially those of US-American origin, mischaracterized the SCS as a fully operational Orwellian system, when as of this year only voluntary opt-in pilot programs exist. To get a sense of Chinese citizens' views on the current state of surveillance, I read Ollier-Malaterre's interview-based book "Living with Digital Surveillance in China".

Writing and World-Building Process:

Writing this novella has taught me that it is oftentimes better to write a page of low quality than nothing at all. Of course, that page has to be cut out later in the editing process, but it is far easier to prevent yourself from getting writer's block if you never lay down your writing utensils.

Humans are multifaceted, characters should be as well. To access my protagonists' voices I had to first figure out who they were as a person and what values defined them. Sometimes the number of pages dedicated to the character's backstory even exceeded the page count of the chapter they starred in.