

CHAPTER 24 — Forced Disagreement

They didn't search anymore.

They already knew where to go.

Not a place.

A condition.

Mai adjusted her movement again.

Slower.

Irregular.

Each step—

slightly off.

Each pause—

misaligned.

“This is it,” she said.

Ace didn’t ask.

“Say it.”

Mai didn’t hesitate.

“We don’t stop it.”

A beat.

“We make it impossible to finish.”

That was the solution.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air—

uneven.

Alive.

“It needs agreement,” she said.

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“So we give it too much.”

That landed.

Ace’s expression didn’t change.

“Then we split it.”

Mai looked at her.

“Not split.”

A beat.

“Conflict.”

That was more precise.

The object—

shifted.

Not aligning—

resisting.

For the first time—

it didn't want to settle.

Good.

V glanced between them.

"...I'm going to assume this is the part where things get worse."

Ace didn't respond.

"Yes," Mai said.

Flat.

They reached another core zone.

Not the same as before.

This one—

unstable.

Not complete—

not broken—

struggling.

“That’s it,” Mai said.

Ace stepped forward.

The space reacted—

immediately.

Trying—

to align.

Shammy pushed—

not against it—

into it.

The air—

fractured.

Multiple directions.

Multiple states.

The alignment—

failed to choose.

Mai lifted the object.

Not toward the center—

away.

At the same time—

she stepped forward.

Two references.

Two alignments.

The system—

hesitated.

That was the opening.

Ace moved.

Not toward either.

Between them.

Third vector.

The space—

broke.

Not violently.

Logically.

It couldn't resolve three competing structures.

The alignment—

collapsed into indecision.

Shammy held it—

not stable—

not unstable—

undefined.

The object—

flickered.

Not aligning—

not resisting—

lost.

“That’s it!” Mai said.

Ace didn’t stop.

She held position—

between all three states.

Forcing the system—

to choose.

It couldn't.

That was the point.

The structure—

didn't collapse.

It failed.

Not destroyed—

not resolved—

stuck.

The pressure—

released.

Across the block—

then the street—

then beyond.

Not gone—

but broken.

Shammy staggered—

the air snapping back—

wild—

real—

alive.

Mai lowered the object.

It resisted.

Strongly now.

Good.

Ace stepped back.

The space—

imperfect.

Messy.

Normal.

V exhaled sharply.

“...Okay.”

A beat.

“...I’m calling that a win.”

Mai didn’t answer.

Because it wasn’t.

“It’s not gone,” she said.

Ace nodded once.

“No.”

A pause.

“But it won’t finish.”

That was enough.

Shammy steadied herself.

The air—

uneven—

but free.

“It can’t agree anymore,” she said.

Mai nodded slowly.

“Yes.”

That was the outcome.

Not destruction.

Not containment.

Constraint.

The system still existed.

But now—

every time it tried to complete—

it would encounter conflict.

Mismatch.

Disagreement.

Permanent.

Ace turned.

“Done.”

Not victory.

Not relief.

Just—

resolution.

As they moved away—

the city continued.

Imperfect.

Alive.

And somewhere within it—

the system remained—

trying—

again—

and again—

to become something whole—

and failing

every time

just before it could.

—

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