

CHAPTER 1 — Story That Already Happened

The Afterlife didn't like ghosts.

Not the dead kind.

The other kind.

Stories that didn't belong.

Ace felt it before Rogue spoke.

Not tension.

Discrepancy.

Conversations—

slightly off.

Names repeated—

out of place.

Fragments of things—

that hadn't happened.

“Media job,” Rogue Amendiares said.

Flat.

Dismissive.

That alone made it worse.

“No bodies,” she continued.

A beat.

“No blood.”

Another.

“Just people remembering things that never happened.”

Silence.

Short.

Ace stepped closer.

“Explain.”

Rogue tapped a shard on the counter.

Didn't push it forward yet.

“CatCo Worldwide Media,” she said.

“Newsroom’s gone sideways.”

V frowned.

“...Sideways how?”

Rogue leaned back slightly.

“Journalists,” she said.

“Editors.”

A pause.

“They remember writing pieces they never filed.”

Another.

“They remember publishing stories that don’t exist.”

Mai’s gaze sharpened.

“System discrepancy,” she said.

Rogue shook her head.

“No,” she said.

“System’s clean.”

A beat.

“People aren’t.”

That landed.

Rogue finally slid the shard across.

Mai picked it up.

No delay.

Data unfolded—

clean—

consistent—

correct.

Internal logs:

- no unauthorized access
 - no missing files
 - no phantom edits
-
-

Everything—

intact.

But attached—

annotations.

Human notes.

Conflicts.

“This article was published yesterday.”
→ no record

“I edited this section at 14:00.”
→ no timestamp

“He was here.”
→ no entry log

Mai stilled.

“Memory divergence,” she said.

Flat.

Rogue nodded once.

“Yeah.”

A pause.

“And it’s spreading.”

That changed it.

Ace didn’t look at the shard.

“Source.”

Rogue’s expression didn’t change.

“Datashard,” she said.

A beat.

“Maybe.”

That wasn't certainty.

“That's what they think,” she added.

V exhaled.

“...Of course it's a shard.”

Mai scrolled further.

Stopped.

Zoomed.

One annotation—

different from the others.

More precise.

More detailed.

“You were in the building,” it read.

“Lower floor. Around 19:20.”

Mai’s eyes flicked up.

To Ace.

Silence.

Short.

Ace didn’t react.

“Incorrect,” she said.

Flat.

Rogue watched her.

“Yeah,” she said.

“That’s the problem.”

A pause.

“It matches security chatter.”

Another.

“Someone remembers you being there.”

V blinked.

“...Wait,” they said.

“...you weren’t.”

Ace didn’t answer.

She didn’t need to.

Mai closed the shard.

Carefully.

“This is not corruption,” she said.

A beat.

“This is insertion.”

Rogue nodded again.

“Exactly.”

She leaned forward slightly.

“Client wants it contained.”

Flat.

“Quiet.”

No headlines.

No panic.

No story.

That was ironic.

“Value,” Ace said.

Rogue didn't hesitate.

"High."

Of course it was.

Mai stepped back.

Processing—

fast—

but controlled.

"Propagation vector unknown," she said.

A pause.

"Containment requires identification."

Rogue shrugged slightly.

“Then identify it,” she said.

A beat.

“Before it writes something bigger.”

Silence.

Ace turned.

“We go.”

No delay.

No negotiation.

As they moved—

Rogue added one thing.

“Hey.”

Ace didn’t turn.

“What.”

Rogue’s voice stayed even.

“Fix it before it becomes a headline.”

A beat.

“Because once it does—”

she tapped the shard once—

light—

precise—

“—it stops being memory.”

Another pause.

“And starts being truth.”

That was worse.

And as they stepped back into Night City—

the noise returned—

the flow—

the constant movement—

unchanged.

Because somewhere—

inside a system built to record what happened—

something had already decided—

what would be remembered.

And it wasn't waiting

for permission.

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