

# CHAPTER 5 — Breaking the Narrative

The system didn't resist.

---

That was the problem.

---

---

Everything accepted itself.

---

---

Every memory—

---

validated.

---

---

Every conclusion—

---

supported.

---

---

Closed loop.

---

---

Perfect.

---

---

Wrong.

---

---

Mai didn't touch the terminal.

---

---

Didn't override.

---

---

Didn't attempt correction.

---

---

"That would reinforce it," she said.

---

---

Flat.

---

---

Ace nodded once.

---

---

"Then we break it."

---

---

Not how.

---

---

Just—

---

direction.

V looked between them.

---

---

“...Break what exactly?”

---

---

Mai answered.

---

---

“Trust.”

---

---

That was the core.

---

---

Shammy stepped forward.

---

---

The air—

---

shifted.

---

---

Subtle.

---

---

Unnoticed.

---

---

---

“They believe it because it feels right,” she said.

---

---

A beat.

---

---

“So we make it feel wrong.”

---

---

That was enough.

---

---

Mai moved.

---

---

Not clean.

---

---

Not optimal.

---

---

Deliberately—

---

---

incorrect.

---

---

She accessed the system—

---

---

not to fix—

---

to introduce conflict.

---

---

Data injection—

---

controlled—

---

targeted.

---

---

A new entry:

---

*“Operator present at 18:40.”*

---

---

Another:

---

*“Operator denied entry at 19:20.”*

---

---

Another:

---

*“No record of operator.”*

---

The system didn't reject them.

---

---

It integrated them.

---

---

Immediately.

---

---

V blinked.

---

---

"...Wait, that worked?"

---

---

Mai didn't look at him.

---

---

"It always works," she said.

---

---

Flat.

---

---

"That is the problem."

---

---

Shammy moved next.

---

---

Not to the system.

---

---

To the people.

---

---

She passed behind the editor—

---

---

close enough—

---

---

the air—

---

---

shifted—

---

---

pressure—

---

---

uneven.

---

---

The editor flinched.

---

---

Just slightly.

---

---

“Something’s off,” she said.

---

---

Not denial.

---

---

Discomfort.

---

---

That was enough.

---

---

Ace stepped forward.

---

---

Into the space again.

---

---

Unaligned.

---

---

Unexpected.

---

---

“You saw me,” she said.

---

---

Flat.

The editor hesitated.

---

---

“Yes.”

---

---

Less certain now.

---

---

“When.”

---

---

The editor opened her mouth—

---

---

paused.

---

---

The memory—

---

---

there—

---

---

clear—

---

---

but—

---

---

now—

---

---

conflicting.

“|—”

---

---

She stopped.

---

---

For the first time—

---

---

the narrative didn't resolve.

---

---

Mai pushed further.

---

---

More contradictions.

---

---

More entries.

---

---

Different angles.

---

---

Different witnesses.

---

---

Nothing aligned.

---

---

Everything—

---

valid.

---

Everything—

---

incompatible.

---

The system slowed.

---

Not breaking.

---

Straining.

---

“It cannot reconcile,” Mai said.

---

A beat.

---

“Too many consistent inconsistencies.”

---

---

---

That was the fracture.

---

---

V exhaled.

---

---

“...Okay,” they said.

---

---

“...now it’s messy.”

---

---

Shammy stepped back.

---

---

The air—

---

---

unsteady.

---

---

The room shifted.

---

---

Not physically.

---

---

Certainty—

---

---

gone.

---

---

People paused.

---

---

Looked at screens.

---

---

At each other.

---

---

Something didn't feel right.

---

---

That was enough.

---

---

The editor stepped back.

---

---

Confused now.

---

---

"This doesn't match," she said.

---

---

A beat.

---

---

---

“It doesn’t line up.”

---

---

Good.

---

---

Ace didn’t move.

---

---

Didn’t need to.

---

---

The story—

---

---

was no longer stable.

---

---

Mai pulled back from the system.

---

---

Didn’t remove anything.

---

---

Didn’t clean it.

---

---

Left it—

broken.

---

---

“Stability lost,” she said.

---

---

Flat.

---

---

“Propagation reduced.”

---

---

Not eliminated.

---

---

Contained.

---

---

V looked around.

---

---

“...So we’re done?”

---

---

Mai shook her head.

---

---

“No.”

---

---

---

A beat.

---

---

“They will rebuild.”

---

---

Of course they would.

---

---

Systems always did.

---

---

But now—

---

---

they would hesitate.

---

---

Second-guess.

---

---

Verify.

---

---

That delay—

---

---

was the point.

Ace turned.

---

---

“We go.”

---

---

No hesitation.

---

---

No need to stay.

---

---

Behind them—

---

the newsroom continued.

---

---

But slower.

---

---

Less certain.

---

---

And for the first time—

---

inside a system built on truth—

---

no one was completely sure  
what had actually happened.

—

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