

EPILOGUE — What Was Left Closed (Final)

The skull didn't change.

That was the problem.

It held.

Too exactly.

Like it had already settled into a state

nothing was allowed to disturb.

Ace placed it on the table.

For a moment—

the surface didn't feel like it was there yet.

Then it was.

The safehouse was quiet.

Not empty.

Not calm.

Held.

Outside, Night City continued—lights shifting, traffic threading through itself, noise stacking into something that never quite resolved.

Inside—

the space didn't move.

Mai watched the skull.

Not scanning.

Not processing.

Just—

holding it in place with her attention.

"It is stable," she said.

A beat.

"...not by itself."

That mattered.

Shammy leaned back against the wall.

The air around her balanced—

but thinner—

like something had been taken out of it

and nothing had replaced it.

“It’s quieter than it should be,” she said.

A pause.

“...like something is missing.”

Not absence.

Removal.

Ace stepped closer.

No distortion.

No reaction.

She reached out—

and for a fraction—

her hand didn’t align with where the skull was.

Then it did.

Contact.

The pressure returned instantly.

Contained.

Compressed.

Too much space forced into too little place—

held there

under something that hadn’t released.

Ace didn’t pull back immediately.

Then—

she let go.

“It’s not off,” she said.

Flat.

But not perfectly timed.

Mai nodded.

“No.”

A beat.

“It is waiting.”

Not a trigger.

Not an event.

A condition.

Shammy shifted slightly.

The air tightened—

then eased—

then held again.

“It didn’t come with us by accident,” she said.

A pause.

“It needed to be here.”

Ace looked at the skull.

Long enough to confirm something she couldn’t fully name.

“...not here,” she said.

Quiet.

Less final than before.

Mai understood anyway.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“This is not where it resolves.”

That was closer.

Silence settled.

Not empty.

Measured.

Outside, the city didn't react.

Didn't shift.

Didn't notice.

But inside—

inside their space—

something that didn't belong

was holding itself in place

without needing to do anything.

Ace turned away.

Didn't track it.

Didn't watch for change.

"That wasn't random," she said.

Quiet.

Not a question.

Mai didn't answer immediately.

Then—

"No."

Flat.

Shammy looked between them.

The air steadied—

barely.

"They knew we'd take it," she said.

A beat.

"They needed us to."

That was enough.

Ace didn't argue.

Because somewhere—

past what she remembered—

past what she could verify—

past anything the city would ever record—

there was a point.

A crossing.

A moment that didn't belong to this sequence at all.

And whatever had happened there—

whatever had been decided—

had already included this.

The skull didn't move.

Didn't react.

Didn't change.

But for a fraction—

one edge didn't sit correctly.

Not visibly.

Not fully.

Just—

wrong.

Then it aligned again.

Like it had never shifted.

Like it had always been exact.

Because whatever it was waiting for—

had not happened yet.

And when it did—

it wouldn't announce itself.

Wouldn't change.

Wouldn't need to.

It would simply—

continue

from a point

that had already

been reached.

—

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