

Chapter 6: Do Not Complete (Rewritten)

The rig wasn't comfortable.

It wasn't supposed to be.

Cables ran clean from deck to interface, neural link seated properly along Mai's spine and neck, haptic feedback suit mapped across her body in tight, responsive lines that translated signal into pressure before thought could catch up.

The chair held her in place.

Not gently.

Not harshly.

Just... precisely.

Ace stood to her left.

Close enough to reach.

Far enough not to interfere.

Shammy stood behind.

Not touching.

Never touching during entry.

"The moment you drift," Ace said.

"I know," Mai replied.

"I cut."

"Yes."

Shammy's voice came softer.

"I watch."

Mai closed her eyes.

Not to focus.

To remove everything else.

"Mark."

The dive hit clean.

Not a fade.

Not a transition.

A replacement.

The world didn't disappear—it lost priority.

Structure took over.

The system unfolded in front of her—not visually, not in any literal sense—but as relationships, connections, vectors that made sense faster than they should have.

This time—

it was deeper.

Because the interface allowed it.

Because her brain was now actually in the system, not touching it from the outside.

“Thirty seconds,” Ace said.

Mai's voice came steady.

“Entry layer stable.”

The structure didn't resist.

Didn't react.

It simply existed.

And that—

was the problem.

“Sixty seconds.”

Mai tracked the boundaries.

Didn't engage.

Didn't resolve.

The gaps appeared again.

Clear.

Defined.

Inviting.

Her mind moved—

faster now.

The rig fed her more data.

More clarity.

More context.

And with that—

more temptation.

“This isn’t passive,” she said quietly.

“What is it,” Ace asked.

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Because she was seeing it differently now.

Not as a system.

As a process.

“It’s waiting for completion,” she said.

Shammy’s voice came low behind her.

“The pressure’s dropping.”

Mai ignored it.

Focused.

The gap formed again.

Closer now.

More precise.

One adjustment—

one alignment—

“Time.”

Ace’s voice cut sharp.

“Pull.”

Mai didn’t.

Not immediately.

Because now—

she had enough data to finish it.

Not guess.

Not approximate.

Finish.

Clean.

Complete.

The system didn't move.

Didn't push.

Didn't pull.

It didn't need to.

She was already there.

"Mai."

Closer now.

"Pull."

"...almost—"

"No."

Flat.

Final.

The word cut through the interface.

Not the system.

Her.

Mai exhaled.

Forced the disconnect.

Hard.

The world snapped back into place with full weight.

Sound.

Pressure.

Gravity.

02:00 → 00:02

She blinked.

Breathing steady—

but not as controlled as before.

“...it’s worse in deep dive,” she said.

Ace didn’t move.

“Explain.”

Mai stared forward.

“It’s not that it reacts faster.”

A pause.

“It’s that I do.”

Silence.

Shammy stepped closer, air stabilizing around her.

“You get better at finishing it.”

Mai nodded once.

“Yes.”

Ace’s voice dropped.

“Then we don’t give you another chance.”

Mai didn’t argue.

Because now—

she understood why.

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