

## Chapter 6: Do Not Complete

The second entry felt easier.

That was the first mistake.

Not because it *was* easier—

but because it seemed like it should be.

The overlay returned without resistance. No delay, no adjustment period. The corridor didn't disappear—it aligned again, lines threading through concrete and metal like they had always been there, just waiting for someone to notice them properly.

Mai didn't move.

Didn't reach.

Didn't solve.

"Thirty seconds," Ace said.

Mai nodded once.

"Entry stable."

The system responded.

Not actively.

Not passively either.

It simply *held*.

Like a surface that didn't ripple when touched.

That was new.

Last time, it had shifted. Adjusted. Accepted input.

Now—

nothing.

Mai tracked the boundary lines, following them without engaging. Where the structure thinned, she stopped. Where gaps formed, she marked them—

and moved on.

Deliberate.

Controlled.

Wrong.

Her mind kept trying to finish the lines.

Edges that almost connected.

Nodes that almost resolved.

Patterns that suggested meaning without locking into it.

“Sixty seconds.”

Mai exhaled slowly.

“I’m holding at surface layer.”

Ace didn’t respond.

Didn’t need to.

Shammy’s voice came softer, closer.

“The air’s... still.”

Mai almost answered.

Didn’t.

Because answering meant thinking.

And thinking—

meant filling.

The system stayed open.

Not expanding.

Not contracting.

Waiting for something that wasn’t coming.

A gap appeared ahead.

Clean.

Defined.

Unresolved.

Mai stopped.

Not physically.

Mentally.

This was it.

The same kind of break as before.

The place where everything wanted to—

No.

She didn't move toward it.

Didn't map it.

Didn't complete it.

She watched.

And for a moment—

nothing happened.

The structure held.

Unchanged.

Unreactive.

Almost...

disappointed.

"Ninety seconds."

Ace's voice was tighter now.

Mai ignored the tone.

Focused.

The gap remained.

Edges stable.

No collapse.

No forced resolution.

Just space.

Empty space.

That shouldn't work.

Systems didn't leave space like this.

They filled it.

Or defended it.

Or disguised it.

This—

did none of that.

Mai's breathing shifted slightly.

Not deeper.

Not faster.

Just...

different.

She adjusted without thinking.

That was the second mistake.

The gap responded.

Not by changing—

but by clarifying.

Edges sharpened.

Connections implied.

The system didn't move.

Her perception did.

And suddenly—

it made sense.

Not fully.

Not completely.

But enough.

One more step.

One more alignment—

"Time."

Ace's voice cut in, sharp now.

"Pull."

Mai didn't.

Not immediately.

Because now she could see it.

The structure wasn't incomplete.

It was—

“Mai.”

Closer.

Right next to her now.

“Pull.”

“I'm not—”

She stopped.

Because she was.

The gap wasn't pulling her in.

It didn't need to.

She was leaning.

Just slightly.

Just enough.

“One more—”

“No.”

Flat.

Final.

Mai's focus snapped sideways—

not away, not fully—

just enough to break the alignment.

The gap blurred.

Edges softening instantly.

Not collapsing.

Just—

waiting again.

The system didn't punish her.

Didn't lock her in.

Didn't react at all.

It simply stopped being clear.

"...disconnecting," Mai said.

She pulled back.

Harder this time.

Not because she had to.

Because she chose to.

The overlay vanished.

The corridor snapped back into full definition, harsh and physical and *real* in a way that felt heavier than it had before.

02:00 → 00:01

One second left.

Mai blinked.

Her hand moved slightly, like she expected to still be interfacing.

It wasn't.

"Clear," she said.

Her voice—

not as steady this time.

Ace didn't step back immediately.

Didn't give her space.

"What changed," she asked.

Mai stared at the wall.

Not seeing it.

"It doesn't need input," she said slowly. "Not in the way I thought."

"Explain."

Mai swallowed once.

"It doesn't build from what you give it."

Ace's eyes narrowed.

"Then what."

Mai turned, finally looking at her.

"It builds from what you almost give it."

Silence.

That one landed deeper.

Shammy stepped closer, her presence grounding the space again—not pushing, just... there.

"The air dropped," she said quietly.

"When."

"Just before you pulled out."

Mai nodded once.

"That's when it aligned."

Ace's hand flexed once at her side.

"You said you weren't going to fill anything."

"I didn't."

"No," Ace said. "You almost did."

Mai didn't argue.

Because that was the problem.

The system didn't need action.

It needed intention.

And intention—

was harder to stop.

"...it sharpens when you approach resolution," Mai said. "Not when you commit to it."

Ace let that sit.

Then:

"So it teaches you what the answer looks like."

Mai's expression tightened slightly.

“Yes.”

“And you want to see the rest.”

“Yes.”

That came out too fast.

Too clean.

Too honest.

Shammy’s gaze flicked between them.

“That’s how they stayed,” she said.

Not a question.

A conclusion.

Mai nodded slowly.

“They weren’t trapped.”

Ace’s voice dropped.

“They chose not to leave.”

“...yes.”

The word hung there.

Heavy.

Final.

The corridor felt smaller now.

Not physically.

But in the way options collapsed when you understood the problem too well.

Ace stepped back finally.

One step.

Enough.

“No more passes.”

Mai didn’t argue.

Didn’t even try.

“...no,” she said.

But her eyes—

still held that edge.

That almost.

Shammy saw it.

Of course she did.

“You’re still inside it,” she said softly.

Mai looked at her.

“No.”

Shammy didn’t push.

Didn’t contradict.

Just watched.

“You’re still thinking in its shape.”

That—

was harder to deny.

Mai exhaled slowly.

“...yes.”

Ace turned toward the exit.

“Then we’re done here.”

She didn’t wait.

Didn’t check.

Just moved.

Mai followed.

Not automatically.

But without resistance.

Shammy stayed a moment longer.

One second.

Two.

Watching the port.

The place where the system still existed.

Unchanged.

Waiting.

Then she turned.

And left it behind.

---

They didn't speak until they were back outside.

The city hit them all at once—noise, motion, light, all of it too loud after the controlled silence below.

Mai stopped under the same flickering sign as before.

Not because she needed to.

Because she was thinking again.

Ace didn't let it build.

“Say it.”

Mai kept her eyes on the street.

“It's not incomplete.”

Ace didn't react.

“We know that.”

Mai's voice dropped slightly.

“It's unfinished on purpose.”

“Still not new.”

Mai exhaled.

“...it doesn't need time.”

That got her attention.

Ace turned fully toward her.

“What.”

Mai looked at her.

“It doesn't need more time to complete.”

A pause.

Then:

“It needs proximity to completion.”

That shifted it.

Hard.

Ace’s expression changed—not fear, not shock.

Recognition.

“Then we’re not dealing with a system,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“No.”

Shammy stepped in beside them.

“Then what is it.”

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Because the answer—

wasn’t clean.

“...a framework,” she said finally. “For finishing things.”

The city noise didn’t cover the silence that followed.

It just filled around it.

Ace looked at her.

“Say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Mai didn’t smile.

“I don’t think I can.”

And that—

more than anything else—

was the real problem.

From:  
<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:  
<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace39:chapter6?rev=1776858739>

Last update: **22/04/2026 11:52**

