

Chapter 8: No Endpoint (Rewritten)

Mai went back into the rig slower.

Not because she hesitated.

Because she chose each movement.

Connection.

Link.

Seal.

The system accepted her immediately.

Of course it did.

“Mark.”

This time—

she didn't search.

Didn't map.

Didn't approach.

She stayed at the edge.

Observed.

The structure remained.

Unresolved.

Unfinished.

Without her pushing—

it did nothing.

Nothing at all.

That was new.

“Thirty seconds.”

Mai's voice stayed level.

“Entry stable.”

No expansion.

No alignment.

No response.

The gaps existed—

but they didn't clarify.

Didn't invite.

Didn't sharpen.

Because she wasn't reaching for them.

"Sixty seconds."

Shammy's voice, softer now:

"The pressure's leveling."

Mai almost smiled.

Inside the system—

it felt like absence.

Like something that should be there—

wasn't.

Because she wasn't completing it.

"Eighty seconds."

Ace didn't wait.

"Pull."

Mai did.

Immediately.

No hesitation.

No delay.

The system vanished.

Not collapsed.

Not destroyed.

Just—

gone.

Because she hadn't engaged it.

She opened her eyes.

The rig released her slowly.

Controlled.

Grounded.

"...it doesn't exist without completion," she said.

Ace nodded.

"Good."

Mai shook her head.

"No."

A pause.

"That's worse."

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

"Why."

Mai sat forward, disconnecting the link.

"Because it means the risk isn't the system."

Her gaze lifted.

"It's the runner."

Silence.

Ace didn't argue.

Didn't need to.

Because that—

was the truth.

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