

CHAPTER 6 — Printed Truth

The system recovered.

It always did.

Not instantly.

Not cleanly.

But inevitably.

CatCo Worldwide Media didn't stop producing.

It couldn't.

Stories had to move.

Even when they didn't hold.

Ace stepped out of the building.

No resistance.

No delay.

The system still recognized her.

That hadn't changed.

Mai followed.

Her gaze—

fast—

but measured.

Controlled now.

Shammy stepped out last.

The air—

uneven—

but settling.

V exhaled.

“...Okay,” they said.

“...that was different.”

No one argued.

Ace didn't slow.

Didn't look back.

She didn't need to.

“It’s not contained,” Mai said.

Flat.

“It is reduced.”

That was the best outcome.

“Good,” Ace said.

That was enough.

V checked their shard.

Paused.

“...Yeah, so—” they muttered.

“...you might want to see this.”

They turned the screen.

A published article.

Live.

Already distributed.

Headline:

“Unidentified Operator Linked to Internal Access Breach”

Subline:

“Conflicting reports confirm presence across multiple timelines.”

Mai stilled.

“That should not have passed,” she said.

Flat.

But it had.

Of course it had.

The system needed closure.

Even broken—

it finished the story.

Ace read it once.

No reaction.

The text scrolled:

“Witness accounts place the operator inside restricted areas prior to official access logs...”

“Security chatter suggests prior recognition...”

“Editorial discrepancies remain under review...”

Everything—

inconsistent.

Everything—

presented as valid.

“That’s not what happened,” V said.

Ace didn’t answer immediately.

Then—

“...No,” she said.

Flat.

“It isn’t.”

A pause.

“But it’s recorded.”

That was the difference.

Mai looked at the article again.

Not the content—

the structure.

“It will propagate,” she said.

A beat.

“Not as fact.”

Another.

“As possibility.”

That was worse.

Shammy tilted her head.

The air—

tightened slightly.

“They’ll remember it differently,” she said.

A pause.

“But they’ll still remember it.”

Ace closed the shard.

Didn't need to see more.

"Payment," she said.

Default.

V nodded.

"Already transferred."

Of course it had.

Rogue didn't wait.

Mai confirmed—

instant.

"Received."

Clean.

Efficient.

Ace stepped forward.

Into the city.

Traffic moved.

Lights shifted.

Voices overlapped.

Nothing changed.

Everything changed.

Because now—

somewhere—

inside systems that tracked—

and recorded—

and defined—

there was a version of her—

that had already done things she hadn't.

And it didn't matter that it wasn't true.

It existed.

That was enough.

V walked beside her.

"...You good with that?" they asked.

Ace didn't answer immediately.

She watched the flow.

The movement.

The gaps.

Everything—

still measurable.

Still real.

"...Doesn't change what I do," she said.

Flat.

Final.

Mai nodded once.

“Correct.”

A beat.

“But it changes how you are seen.”

Ace didn’t respond.

She didn’t need to.

Because that had already happened.

And in Night City—

being seen—

was never neutral.

As they moved deeper into the streets—

the article spread—

copied—

referenced—

remembered.

Not as truth.

Not as fiction.

But as something in between.

And that—

was enough
to make it real.

—

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