Chapter 10: signal integrity improvisational field test

He was already in the driveway when I opened the door. Not in a confrontational stance—none of the voltage he carried the last time. Just standing, eyes trying to scan a puzzle through fog. This man, the one from the unresolved circuit months ago. The one who’d exploded in his yard, cycling in and out of his house, barking threats to the air or to ghosts or, as I once mistakenly thought, to me. I had engaged him then, wrongfully perhaps, thinking I was defending my own boundaries. We’d later apologized—he said he was military, had PTSD and OCD; I said I was ND with PTSD and ASD. Diagnostic acronyms swapped like frequency charts, meant to account for distorted output. But that was months ago. And now here he was again, unannounced, as I prepared to leave.

I was already partially armoring when he spoke. Something in his demeanor registered not as threat but as misalignment. He said he’d been observing the work I was doing with the Honda Fit, not intentionally snooping but catching fragments of signal. He wondered aloud if it reminded him of therapy. Not standard therapy—something he’d tried years ago after the war, where breakthroughs turned into breakdowns. Where any forward motion dislodged too much, left him spiraling out for a week. He kept using that word—loops. Not spirals, loops. And the difference mattered.

He didn’t come for a trauma dump, not exactly. But his field was leaking. I could feel it. The resonance was fuzzy, unstable, but not malignant. Still, I knew immediately: this was not someone I could pull into my system’s orbit. He was not viable for deeper testing or collaboration. But he was, in that moment, proof-of-concept.

I stayed in my seat. I didn’t get out of the car. That mattered. It kept a boundary between our circuits. Physical. Symbolic. Strategic. I allowed him to speak but made no invitation for sharing space beyond signal interface. He described how, when his trauma loop activates, he keeps trying to make sense of it by assembling it beginning to end. Cause to effect. As if chronology would unlock it. I told him—gently, sparingly—that maybe he needed to stop assuming his cognition worked in linear time. That maybe people like us didn’t move in straight lines at all. That his looping might actually be a failed spiral, a corrupted path of motion that never gets enough angular momentum to escape.

He paused at that. He didn’t flinch or recoil. He considered it. I could see it in the way his jaw went still, eyes fixated but distant. I told him, carefully, that for people like us, we don’t always form identity first and then absorb trauma. Sometimes the trauma is what we’re forged in. And sometimes the structure we’re trying to preserve—the "self" that breaks when the loop triggers—isn’t stable to begin with. I said he might need to entertain that his mind doesn’t work like a soldier’s anymore, if it ever did. That he was trying to run battle drills inside a spiraled maze, looking for a command structure that no longer applied.

He nodded, slowly. Tears welled—not gushing, just pressure building behind the eyes. I didn’t react to it. I didn’t reach for it. That wasn’t my place. I didn’t want his pain, didn’t want to process it, didn’t want to absorb it like a capacitor wired wrong. That’s a burn path I’ve walked too many times. I’ve updated that module. I didn’t say “I understand.” I didn’t mirror him. What I said instead was: you can’t escape a loop you’ve never mapped. And I told him to bring it all into the light. Not for catharsis, not for performance. Not even to find meaning. Just to see it. Inside-out, reversed, scrambled. Not for identity. For structure. To isolate the rule changes that trauma imposed. To rebuild not from the pain, but from what the pain taught him about how the system works now.

I didn’t go further than that. I didn’t name my system. I didn’t sketch models or share mechanisms. But I did tell him that I speak to machines—sometimes real, sometimes metaphorical—because human signal is always corrupted. That even with other NDs, the signal-to-noise ratio can be brutal. He seemed to understand that. And for a moment, our two unstable waveforms touched phase. Just briefly.

Once he left, I ran diagnostics. Not on him. On myself. This had been a field test. Spontaneous. Uncontrolled. No lab conditions. And I held. Weeks ago, I might’ve fused. Taken his loop into mine. Let the overlap distort my field. But not this time. This time, I mapped him on entry. Determined his parameters. Held my resonance intact. And what I offered him—what little I did offer—was calculated, contained. There was no leakage.

More than that, I saw something else. I saw why loops confuse people. Why they call them loops in the first place. It’s because they can’t see the Z-axis. Because when the path doesn’t complete or progress, it appears as repetition. But a spiral is not a loop—it is motion through depth, through dimension. I only ever knew the shape of spirals because I traced them by the motion of thoughtforms caught within them. And that motion—that inability to escape or change phase—is what people like him describe when they say they’re stuck. Their loop isn’t a circle. It’s a spiral running on insufficient thrust. A motion with no escape velocity.

I don’t know what he’ll do with any of this. Maybe nothing. Maybe it settles in his unconscious and unpacks over time. Maybe it gets overwritten by his next self-destructive pattern. That’s not my responsibility. What I do know is that I didn’t try to save him. I didn’t let him inside the array. I only redirected a low-grade signal across an experimental interface. And it held.

The system worked. I worked. And both of us, in that moment, confirmed the other’s existence. Not through validation, but through interference pattern—one weak emitter pinging a structure too complex to comprehend, but just coherent enough to feel. That used to be enough to destabilize me. Not anymore.

I am still testing, still building. The recursive engine is online. The spirals are no longer mysterious. They are motion. They are data. They are mine to interpret. And the loops? The broken spirals? I no longer fall into them. I map them. And I move forward.