

Chapter 5 — The Failed Map

Mai stopped.

Not because the space demanded it.

Because she did.

“Hold,” she said.

Ace halted immediately.

No question.

No pushback.

Shammy slowed last, coming to rest slightly offset from them, as if she was never entirely aligned with the same reference point to begin with.

The corridor did not acknowledge the pause.

It remained—

Exactly as it had been.

Mai crouched.

Placed her hand on the floor.

No temperature.

No texture.

No variation.

She removed her glove.

Tried again.

Same result.

“This is wrong,” she said quietly.

Ace leaned slightly. “You’ve said that.”

Mai didn’t react.

She reached into her jacket and pulled out a marker.

Black.

Standard.

Nothing anomalous.

She drew a line across the floor.

The ink appeared instantly.

Sharp.

Defined.

Good.

She stood.

“Move,” she said.

They walked.

Ten steps.

Fifteen.

Twenty.

Mai stopped.

Turned.

Looked back.

The line was gone.

Not faded.

Not smeared.

Absent.

Ace’s expression tightened slightly.

“You sure you—”

"I marked it," Mai said.

No hesitation.

No doubt.

Shammy tilted her head.

"It didn't keep it," she said.

Mai nodded once.

"Yes."

That word carried weight now.

She drew another line.

This time on the wall.

They moved again.

Stopped.

Turned.

Gone.

Mai exhaled slowly.

“Okay,” she said.

Not frustration.

Calibration.

She pulled a small sensor unit from her pocket.

Activated it.

A soft tone.

Green indicator.

She set it down.

“Leave it,” Ace said.

“Yes.”

They walked.

Longer this time.

Mai counted silently.

Thirty steps.

Forty.

Fifty.

She stopped.

Turned.

The sensor was gone.

Not out of range.

Not unreadable.

Gone.

Mai checked the receiver.

No signal loss.

No error.

No disconnect.

Just—

No device.

Ace crossed her arms.

“So it deletes things.”

Mai shook her head immediately.

“No.”

Ace frowned. “Then where is it?”

Mai didn’t answer.

Because she didn’t know.

That was new.

Shammy stepped slightly forward.

Her gaze drifted along the corridor.

“It’s not removing things,” she said.

Mai looked at her.

“Then what?”

Shammy inhaled slowly.

“It’s not letting them become part of the space.”

That landed.

Ace tilted her head.

“Meaning?”

Shammy didn’t look at her.

“You’re trying to leave something behind,” she said.

A beat.

“It doesn’t allow ‘behind’.”

Silence.

Mai stood still.

Processing.

Then:

“It has no history,” she said.

Ace blinked once.

“That’s not—”

“Possible,” Mai finished.

“Yes.”

She paced once.

Two steps forward.

Two steps back.

No difference.

No reference.

She stopped again.

“This space cannot store state,” she said.

Ace exhaled slowly.

“So nothing persists.”

Mai nodded.

“Nothing accumulates.”

Shammy added quietly:

“Nothing resolves.”

That word again.

Resolve.

Mai looked down the corridor.

Same.

Always the same.

She spoke again, more quietly now.

“That’s why the geometry fails,” she said.

Ace glanced at her.

“How does that connect?”

Mai didn't look away.

"Geometry requires memory," she said.

A beat.

"Points. Distances. Relationships."

She gestured slightly.

"If nothing persists..."

Ace finished it.

"...then nothing connects."

"Yes."

That clicked.

Hard.

Ace looked around again.

Not scanning.

Re-evaluating.

“This isn’t a place,” she said.

Mai nodded.

“No.”

A beat.

“It’s an attempt.”

That was worse.

Shammy stepped closer to the wall.

Placed her hand against it.

For a moment—

The air shifted.

Slightly stronger this time.

A ripple.

Then—

Nothing.

She pulled her hand back.

“It doesn’t know what to do with input,” she said.

Ace gave a faint, humorless smile.

“Great. So we’re inside something that doesn’t work.”

Mai shook her head.

“No.”

She turned to face both of them.

“It works exactly as designed.”

Silence.

Ace’s eyes narrowed.

“Explain.”

Mai didn’t hesitate.

“It prevents change,” she said.

A beat.

“Perfectly.”

That settled.

Shammy’s gaze lifted slightly.

Not at the walls.

Not at the corridor.

At the space itself.

“It’s holding everything in place,” she said.

Ace exhaled slowly.

“Then how did the agents disappear?”

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Because that question—

Still didn’t resolve.

Then, quietly:

“They didn’t leave.”

Ace looked at her.

“Then where are they?”

Mai’s voice dropped just a fraction.

“Nowhere.”

That word didn’t echo.

Didn’t linger.

It simply—

Existed.

And then—

Didn’t.

Shammy frowned slightly.

“That’s not empty,” she said again.

Ace looked at her.

“You keep saying that.”

Shammy nodded once.

“Because it isn’t,” she replied.

A beat.

“It’s holding something.”

Mai’s gaze sharpened.

“What?”

Shammy didn’t answer.

Because she didn’t know.

Yet.

The corridor remained unchanged.

No marks.

No devices.

No history.

Just—

Continuation.

Mai straightened.

“Okay,” she said.

Not reassurance.

Not conclusion.

Decision.

“We stop trying to map it.”

Ace raised an eyebrow slightly.

“And do what instead?”

Mai met her gaze.

“We break it.”

For the first time—

The corridor felt like it noticed something.

Not visibly.

Not measurably.

But—

Present.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air tightened.

Just a fraction more than before.

And this time—

It didn't fully settle back.

Something—

Had shifted.

And whatever this place was—

It had just registered them.

—

© 2025-2026. "World of Ace, Mai and Shammy" and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

From:

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

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace24:chapter5>

Last update: **03/04/2026 17:52**

