

CHAPTER 3 — The Hallway That Repeats

The corridor didn't begin.

It was simply—

there.

Ace stepped into it without slowing.

Behind them, the space shifted. Not violently, not even noticeably at first—just enough that the path they had come through was no longer the same path anymore.

That didn't matter.

Forward did.

The walls were wrong.

Not broken.

Layered.

Mai stopped.

Not out of hesitation.

Recognition.

"Pattern saturation," she said.

Flat.

But her voice had slowed, just slightly.

For the first time.

Ace didn't ask.

She looked.

And saw it.

Text.

Every surface. Every layer. Every depth.

Written. Carved. Scratched. Burned. Etched.

Different tools. Different hands. Different moments.

The same words.

BAD WOLF

Again.

And again.

And again.

No beginning.

No end.

Just repetition, stacked on itself until it stopped being sequence and became something else entirely.

Mai moved closer to the wall.

She didn't touch it.

She didn't need to.

"It is not sequential," she said.

A beat.

"No origin point."

The words didn't spread.

They didn't propagate.

They existed.

All at once.

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

The air tightened, then slipped—like it couldn't decide how to settle around something that refused to behave like a normal structure.

"This isn't pressure," she said.

A pause, searching for the right shape of it.

"It's... direction."

The wrong kind of direction.

Everywhere at once.

Ace looked at it once.

Only once.

Then she moved.

Forward.

She didn't follow the wall.

Didn't track the pattern.

She ignored it.

That mattered.

Because the moment you followed it—

it changed.

Shifted.

Adjusted.

Mai noticed immediately.

"It reacts to attention," she said.

Flat.

“That is consistent.”

With everything else.

Shammy stayed centered.

She didn't lock onto any single point. Didn't let her focus collapse inward.

The air held better that way.

Not stable.

But balanced.

Almost.

The corridor stretched.

Then didn't.

Distance collapsed, then extended again, like it was trying different versions of itself and failing to commit.

But the words—

never changed.

BAD WOLF

Always there.

Always the same.

Ace didn't slow.

Didn't react.

She moved through it as if it wasn't there at all.

That was the only way forward.

Mai followed, adjusting as she went. Not optimizing. Not forcing the space into something cleaner than it was.

Allowing the inconsistency.

Working with it instead of against it.

Shammy anchored the space behind them, her presence holding just enough pressure to keep the corridor from collapsing into something unusable.

Barely.

But enough.

And then—

the hallway ended.

Not gradually.

Not cleanly.

It simply stopped.

The wall ahead was unmarked.

No words.

No pattern.

Nothing.

That was worse.

Mai stepped forward, slower now, more deliberate.

“The saturation stops here,” she said.

A beat.

“Boundary condition.”

Of course it was.

Ace didn't wait.

She reached the wall—
and pushed.

There was no resistance.

No mechanism.

The surface shifted, opened without actually opening—like the idea of a barrier had been removed instead of the barrier itself.

Beyond it, the space held.

Stable.

Clean.

Wrong in a different way.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air settled.

For the first time since they had entered the building.

"They're here," she said.

Not guessing.

Knowing.

Mai didn't argue.

"Confirmed."

Flat.

Ace stepped through.

No hesitation.

No delay.

And the moment she crossed—
the hallway behind them ceased to exist.

Not collapsed.

Not erased.

Just—
no longer relevant.

As if it had never needed to be there at all—
except to bring them
exactly
where they were expected.

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