

ACE 35 — “Blind Transport”

Chapter 5 — Loss Function (Refined)

The room did not react to panic.

That was the first thing that became clear.

Nothing accelerated.

Nothing lunged.

Nothing revealed itself in a way that rewarded fear.

It simply—

removed tolerance.

Ace held the statue in her hands.

It had not resisted.

Had not shifted.

Had not acted.

And yet—

it was closer.

Not by distance.

By priority.

Mai saw it in the way Ace’s posture adjusted.

Not movement.

Micro-correction.

Centerline tightening—

as if something was asking to be aligned

and her body was answering without permission.

“Don’t compensate,” Mai said immediately.

Ace didn’t look at her.

“...it’s adjusting.”

“I know.”

A beat.

“Don’t agree with it.”

That landed differently.

Shammy’s gaze flickered across the remaining three.

Her breathing wasn’t hers anymore.

The room had flattened it—

smoothed variation—

removed irregularity—

forced continuity where there should have been noise.

“...coverage degrading,” she said.

Mai recalculated.

Faster now.

Not building a stable model anymore—

just delaying collapse.

Four objects.

Three observers.

One already destabilized.

“...we can’t hold all four,” she said.

Ace answered instantly.

“...we don’t.”

A beat.

“...we choose how we fail.”

Shammy’s voice dropped.

“...which one.”

Mai shook her head.

“No.”

A beat.

“Not which.”

Another.

"How."

The room tightened.

Not physically.

The cost of looking increased.

Holding a single statue in stable observation now required more than sight.

It required alignment.

Shared interpretation.

Agreement.

And that—

was already failing.

Ace moved.

Sideways.

Not retreat.

Not advance.

Reposition.

The statue in her hands moved—

or remained—

with her.

That distinction was no longer reliable.

Mai adjusted instantly.

Rebuilt angular coverage across the remaining three.

Her gaze fragmented—

tracking multiple vectors—

never stabilizing long enough to be captured.

"...don't cross lines," she said.

Ace didn't respond.

She already had.

Shammy stepped half a pace forward.

The air resisted—

then yielded—

incomplete.

“...they’re weighting attention,” she said.

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“More observers doesn’t stabilize them.”

Another.

“It destabilizes us.”

The first failure came quietly.

Shammy blinked.

Not intentional.

Not full.

Just—

human.

The moment her eyes closed—

something slipped.

Mai felt it.

Not movement.

Loss of continuity.

“...count,” she said.

Ace didn’t hesitate.

“...four.”

Shammy forced her gaze across the room.

One.

Two.

Three—

a hitch—

"...four."

But it didn't match.

Mai turned—

sharp.

"Again."

Shammy adjusted.

Forced it.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

"...four."

Mai didn't accept it.

She stepped left.

Rebuilt angles.

Forced overlap.

"...positions."

Ace's voice dropped.

"...wrong."

Mai's eyes locked to the far corner.

One statue—

off-axis.

Not gone.

Not replaced.

Shifted.

Closer to center.

Barely.

Enough.

"...that wasn't a full loss," Mai said.

Shammy answered.

"...it didn't need one."

Ace adjusted her grip.

The statue in her hands—

felt heavier.

Not mass.

Load.

"...it's syncing," she said.

Mai discarded the model.

Rebuilt.

Faster.

"...they're not independent."

A beat.

"They're sharing state."

Silence.

Shammy exhaled.

The air didn't respond.

"...then error propagates."

Mai nodded.

"Yes."

Another shift.

Not the statues.

The room.

The space between them—

compressed.

Not distance.

Decision.

Less room to be wrong.

Ace moved again.

Deliberate.

She turned—

slightly—

repositioning the statue.

The moment her angle changed—

everything failed.

Not visibly.

Not violently.

But completely.

Mai felt it collapse—

like a system losing reference.

"...count!" she snapped.

Ace answered immediately.

"...four."

Shammy—

late.

"...four."

Mai stepped.

Forced alignment.

Rebuilt.

"...positions."

Ace didn't answer.

That was enough.

"...three," she said.

Silence.

Shammy's breath caught.

"...no."

Mai turned—

fast—

counted—

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

All present.

All wrong.

All closer.

The pedestals—

no longer mattered.

The center of the room did.

"...they're collapsing inward," Mai said.

Ace didn't move.

Didn't blink.

Didn't yield.

"...then we move out."

Mai shook her head.

Slow.

Certain.

"No."

A beat.

"They're collapsing to where we agree the room is."

Silence.

Shammy's voice dropped.

"...and we're defining it."

Ace's grip tightened.

Minimal.

The statue in her hands—

tilted.

Not from her.

Toward her.

Her voice didn't change.

"...we're not transporting them."

A beat.

"...we're stabilizing their space."

That was worse.

The room—

listened.

Mai's gaze sharpened.

Locked.

Focused.

"...then we stop stabilizing it," she said.

Shammy looked at her.

Really looked.

"...you mean—"

Mai didn't blink.

"We desynchronize."

Silence.

Ace didn't ask how.

She already understood.

Three observers.

Three incompatible interpretations.

No shared frame.

No agreement.

No stability.

Her voice dropped.

Flat.

Final.

“...we break it on purpose.”

For the first time—

the statues

did not feel like they were waiting to move—

but waiting

for permission

to stop being

the same thing.

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