

ACE 38 — Dead Channel (Act 3: Missing Timing)

They didn't run.

That would've been too clear.

Ace stepped into the hallway first.

Slow.

Measured.

The space answered wrong.

Not delayed.

Not misaligned.

Just—

Empty.

"...okay," she said quietly.

"...stay close."

Mai followed.

Not looking forward.

Looking *between* things.

"Don't track movement," she said.

Ace frowned.

“...what else is there.”

Mai didn't answer.

Shammy stepped out last.

The air—

Didn't exist properly.

“...it's thinner,” she said.

Ace blinked.

“...that's not a thing.”

“...it is here.”

□ **THE HALLWAY**

They moved.

Step.

Step.

No echo.

No resistance.

Nothing to anchor movement.

Mai slowed.

“...this isn’t right.”

Ace glanced at her.

“...you’ve said that five times.”

Mai shook her head.

“No,” she said.

A beat.

“I’ve been wrong five different ways.”

That landed.

□ **FIRST FAILURE**

A shape moved at the end of the corridor.

Ace saw it.

“Contact.”

She moved—

Stopped.

Forced herself to.

“...no.”

The shape—

Resolved.

A person.

Standing still.

Too still.

Mai narrowed her eyes.

“...they’re not moving.”

Ace exhaled.

“...yeah, I can see that.”

Shammy stepped forward.

The air didn't shift.

“...they're waiting,” she said.

□ THE PERSON

“Hey—”

The voice came out flat.

Not monotone.

Just—

Disconnected.

“I'm supposed to—”

He stopped.

Blinking.

"...what was I doing."

Silence.

Ace didn't move.

"...don't answer that," she said.

The man looked at her.

"...why."

Mai stepped forward slightly.

"Because it matters," she said.

A beat.

"And you don't have it anymore."

The man frowned.

"...that doesn't make sense."

Shammy tilted her head.

“...you lost the moment before the choice,” she said softly.

The man blinked again.

“...I had it.”

A pause.

“...I think.”

□ **COLLAPSE BUILDING**

Ace took one step closer.

“...don't move,” she said.

The man nodded.

Too quickly.

“...okay.”

A beat.

Then—

He moved.

Wrong direction.

Too early.

Mai's voice snapped:

“Stop!”

Too late.

He reached for a door—

Missed it.

His hand hit empty air where the handle *should have been*.

The door—

Was still there.

But not for him.

 **SNAP**

The moment broke.

Hard.

The man stumbled forward—

Into Ace’s line.

She moved—

Just slightly—

Too late.

Their timing didn’t match.

They collided.

Not hard.

But wrong.

□ **RESULT**

The man hit the wall.

Slid down.

Didn't get up.

Not unconscious.

Just—

Done.

□ **SILENCE**

Everything stopped.

Not physically.

Decision-wise.

Mai exhaled slowly.

“...it's spreading.”

Ace shook her head.

“No.”

A beat.

“...it’s erasing timing.”

Shammy closed her eyes briefly.

“...it’s removing the space where actions connect,” she said.

□ ESCALATION

A sound behind them.

Another person.

Running.

Fast.

Too fast.

“...help—”

He turned the corner—

Saw them—

Adjusted—

Too much.

His foot slipped.

Not because of the floor.

Because the step didn't align.

He crashed hard.

Didn't even try to recover.

Just—

Stopped.

□ REALIZATION

Mai's voice dropped.

"...it's not affecting individuals."

A beat.

“...it’s affecting sequences.”

Ace exhaled.

“...great.”

Shammy looked down the corridor.

Deeper.

“...and we’re inside it.”

□ **THE CHOICE**

Silence.

Heavy.

Ace looked between them.

“...we get out,” she said.

Mai didn’t respond immediately.

“...if we leave now,” she said slowly, “we don’t understand it.”

Ace stared at her.

“...if we stay,” she said, “we stop functioning.”

Shammy didn’t move.

“...we need one more observation,” she said.

Ace blinked.

“...fast.”

□ THE TEST

Mai stepped forward.

Not toward the people.

Toward the space between them.

“...watch,” she said.

She moved—

Deliberately—

Wrong.

A step too early.

A pause too long.

A turn that didn't belong.

Everything—

Reacted.

The hallway shifted.

Not physically.

Structurally.

The timing tried to correct—

Failed.

□ **BREAK**

For a moment—

Everything aligned.

Perfectly.

Every movement.

Every sound.

Every breath.

Then—

Gone.

□ **FINAL REALIZATION**

Mai stopped.

Turned slowly.

“...it needs continuity,” she said.

Ace frowned.

“...so we break it.”

Shammy shook her head.

“...no.”

A pause.

“...we don't give it any.”

Silence.

That was worse.

□ EXIT

Ace turned toward the exit.

“...we're leaving.”

No argument.

No hesitation.

They moved.

Not together.

Not aligned.

Not predictable.

The hallway resisted—

Then let go.

□ **FINAL BEAT**

Behind them—

The man on the floor twitched.

Just once.

Like something almost connected.

Then didn't.

And stayed that way.

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