

ACE 38 — Dead Channel (Act 4: Outside, Still Missing)

They didn't stop until the rain hit properly.

The moment Ace stepped out into the street—
Sound came back.

Not fully.

But enough to notice the difference.

"...okay," she muttered.

"...that's better."

It wasn't.

Mai slowed immediately.

"...no," she said.

A beat.

"It followed us."

Ace exhaled.

“...figures.”

Shammy stepped out last.

The rain touched her—

Then hesitated.

Just for a fraction.

“...it’s not contained,” she said.

□ **THE STREET**

Pacifica didn’t change.

It looked the same.

People moved.

Cars passed.

Noise existed.

But—

Not quite right.

A pedestrian stopped at the edge of the street.

Waited.

Then stepped forward—

Half a second too early.

A car braked—

Half a second too late.

No collision.

Just—

Too close.

Everyone adjusted.

Too much.

□ **CASCADE**

A second pedestrian reacted—

To the wrong thing.

A third paused—

For no reason.

The flow broke.

Not violently.

But completely.

Ace watched it unfold.

“...this is bad.”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“It’s not removing actions.”

Another.

“It’s removing alignment.”

□ ESCALATION

A vendor shouted something.

No one reacted.

Not because they ignored it.

Because they didn't *hear it in time*.

The moment passed.

Gone.

Shammy stepped into the flow.

The air resisted.

"...it's spreading through interaction," she said.

Ace glanced at her.

"...so the more people—"

"—the worse it gets," Mai finished.

▣ **DECISION POINT**

Silence.

Heavy.

Ace looked around.

“...we can’t let this scale.”

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Because she didn’t like the answer.

“...we have to isolate it,” she said finally.

Ace frowned.

“...how.”

Shammy’s gaze drifted.

“...we find where it anchors.”

□ THE TRACE

Mai closed her eyes briefly.

Not scanning the net.

Scanning the pattern.

"...it's not random," she said.

A beat.

"It's centered."

Ace blinked.

"...where."

Mai opened her eyes.

Looked back.

Toward the building.

"...there."

Silence.

Ace sighed.

“...of course.”

□ INTERRUPTION

A voice cut through the noise.

Close.

Too close.

“You’re leaving the sequence.”

They turned.

He stood across the street.

No rush.

No tension.

Just—

There.

THE DIFFERENCE

Something was wrong.

Not like before.

Not clean.

Not fully aligned.

He looked—

Slightly off.

DIALOGUE

Mai stepped forward.

“You didn’t expect this to spread.”

He didn’t answer immediately.

“...I expected it to stabilize faster,” he said.

That was new.

Ace tilted her head.

“...so this isn’t working the way you want.”

A pause.

“...not yet.”

□ **TRUTH**

Shammy’s voice dropped.

“...you don’t control this.”

He looked at her.

For a moment—

Nothing.

Then:

“No,” he said.

Flat.

“But I understand it.”

That was worse.

▢ ESCALATION

Behind them—

A shout.

A crash.

This time—

Impact.

Small.

But real.

The timing slipped too far.

The system didn't catch it.

□ TRIAD SHIFT

Ace stepped forward.

“...then we end it.”

Mai shook her head immediately.

“No.”

A beat.

“We don’t know how.”

Shammy didn’t move.

“...we don’t end it,” she said.

They both looked at her.

“...we starve it.”

□ REALIZATION

Mai’s eyes sharpened.

“...it needs interaction.”

Ace nodded slowly.

“...so we remove it from the flow.”

□ **FINAL MOVE**

Ace turned to the street.

“Clear out!” she shouted.

People hesitated.

Too late.

Wrong timing.

Mai moved.

Intercepting.

Redirecting.

Breaking flow manually.

Shammy—

Pulled the air tight.

Not controlling—

Reducing.

The space shrank.

Less interaction.

Less overlap.

Less timing.

□ **EFFECT**

The distortion weakened.

Not gone.

But—

Contained.

The street slowed.

Not normal.

But not collapsing.

□ FINAL EXCHANGE

Ace looked at him.

“...we’re cutting it off.”

He watched the space change.

Actually watching.

“...temporary,” he said.

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“That’s enough.”

Shammy stepped forward.

The air held.

“...it can’t grow without contact,” she said.

□ **DISENGAGE**

He stepped back.

Not resisting.

Not pushing.

Evaluating.

“...you’re learning faster,” he said.

Ace smirked faintly.

“...you’re falling behind.”

A pause.

Then—

“...no,” he said.

Calm.

“I’m adjusting.”

And then—

He was gone.

□ **END STATE**

The street held.

Barely.

People moved slower.

More carefully.

Not normal.

But stable.

□ **FINAL LINE**

Mai exhaled slowly.

“...this isn’t over.”

Ace nodded.

“...yeah.”

A beat.

“...but now it has rules.”

Shammy looked at the space between people.

“...and gaps.”

Rain fell.

Almost—

In sync.

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