

ACE 35 — “Blind Transport”

Chapter 4 — Contact Geometry (Refined)

No one moved immediately.

That wasn't hesitation.

It was cost.

Four statues.

Three observers.

One instability.

The room didn't push.

Didn't escalate.

Didn't react.

It simply held—

in a way that made the next action

more expensive than it should have been.

Mai shifted first.

Not forward.

Sideways.

A partial step—

not enough to relocate—

just enough to disturb alignment.

Her eyes didn't settle.

They moved continuously.

Not scanning.

Maintaining.

“Don't anchor,” she said quietly.

“Fixed focus increases drift.”

Ace didn't answer.

Her gaze had already changed.

No longer fixed—

distributed.

Moving.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Never fully leaving any one of them.

Never fully committing to any of them either.

Shammy inhaled.

The air didn't respond.

Didn't compress.

Didn't shift.

It simply—

refused.

That confirmed it.

"This place isn't neutral," she said.

A beat.

"It's prioritizing them."

Mai didn't look away.

"Of course it is."

Another beat.

"It was designed to."

Silence.

Then—

Ace moved.

Forward.

Clean.

No adjustment.

No correction.

Her step cut the distance exactly—

as if the space had agreed to let her cross it.

She stopped within reach.

Not closer.

Not further.

Exactly where the system allowed interaction.

The statue in front of her—

did not move.

Stone.

Still.

Winged form held in a posture that implied motion—

without resolving into it.

Ace didn't look at the face.

Didn't center.

Her focus stayed lower—

mass.

Angle.

Load.

"...it's balanced wrong," she said.

Mai watched from offset.

Tracking the geometry.

"Not wrong," she said.

A beat.

"Conditional."

Shammy's gaze split between the remaining three.

Not evenly.

Never evenly.

Just enough to maintain continuity—

barely.

“...don’t break the triangle,” she said.

Ace didn’t wait.

Her hand moved.

Not fast.

Not slow.

Direct.

Contact.

The world didn’t react.

No sound.

No light shift.

No distortion.

But something—

deep—

tightened.

Not resistance.

Alignment.

The moment she touched it—

she became part of the system.

“...it’s registering,” she said.

Mai’s response came sharper.

“Everything here is.”

Ace adjusted her grip.

Stone.

Cold.

But not inert.

There was tension inside it—

not pressure—

constraint.

Like a state waiting for deviation.

"...it's not passive," Ace said.

"No," Mai replied.

A beat.

"It's waiting for inconsistency."

Shammy's breathing slowed.

Not by choice.

The room was shaping it—

small corrections—

barely noticeable—

impossible to resist.

"Coverage is slipping," she said.

Mai didn't deny it.

"I know."

Ace lifted.

The statue rose.

No resistance.

No weight shift.

That was wrong.

Mass existed—

but the system compensated for it.

"...load doesn't match," Ace said.

Mai's eyes narrowed.

"Because it's not fully resolved."

A beat.

"Hold it."

Ace held it.

Just above the pedestal.

Still within observation.

Still within agreement.

Still—

still.

Shammy adjusted.

Micro-movements.

Her gaze never stopping—

never locking—

never stabilizing.

Left.

Right.

Forward.

Back.

“...this isn’t sustainable,” she said.

Mai didn’t argue.

“It’s not meant to be.”

Ace stepped back.

One step.

The moment the statue left the pedestal’s influence—

the room changed.

Not visibly.

Not immediately.

But—

certainty dropped.

Light lost authority.

Edges softened—

not blurred—

uncommitted.

Distance stopped agreeing with itself.

Mai felt it instantly.

"...reference shift," she said.

Ace's grip tightened.

"...good."

"No," Mai snapped.

"Uncontrolled."

Shammy's voice dropped.

"...they're adjusting."

The other three statues—

didn't move.

But—

they weren't where they had been.

Not exactly.

Not enough to see.

Enough to feel.

Mai's breath caught—

late.

"...count," she said.

Ace didn't look away from the one in her hands.

"...four."

Shammy tracked.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

"...four."

Mai stepped forward.

Half a pace.

Rebuilt the geometry.

Forced alignment.

"...again."

Ace didn't like it.

Didn't argue.

Mai blinked.

Full.

Clean.

The room held.

Then—

"...count."

"...four."

"...four."

Shammy's voice came slightly off.

Not delayed.

Misaligned.

Mai exhaled.

"...position check."

Ace didn't hesitate.

"...it moved."

Mai's head snapped.

"Where."

"...closer."

Shammy's gaze snapped to the far corner—

and held.

"...it is."

One statue—

off-center.

Barely.

Centimeters.

Enough to invalidate everything.

Mai's voice flattened.

"...they don't require absence."

A beat.

"They require transition."

Ace shifted her stance.

The statue in her hands remained still.

Perfectly.

"...then we don't transition."

Mai shook her head.

Slow.

Controlled.

"You already did."

Silence.

Shammy's fingers tightened—

no air responded.

Nothing stabilized.

"...they're learning us," she said.

Ace didn't blink.

Didn't move.

Didn't give them anything.

"...then we stop being predictable."

Mai's gaze accelerated.

Tracking broke into fragments.

Rebuilt.

Discarded.

Rewritten.

“...no,” she said.

A beat.

“We stop being consistent.”

The room reacted.

Not approval.

Not resistance.

Recognition.

Ace adjusted her grip.

Shifted—

slightly—

just enough—

The statue in her hands—

felt

closer.

Not moved.

Not lifted.

Closer.

Her voice dropped.

“...it’s already inside the gap.”

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Last update: **13/04/2026 07:47**

