

ACE 35 — “Blind Transport”
Chapter 8 — The Fifth Condition

They didn't slow down.

That was the only reason it worked as long as it did.

Three trajectories.

No synchronization.

No shared frame.

Ace moved first.

Always.

Not because she was leading—

but because hesitation created agreement.

The space ahead didn't resemble a corridor anymore.

Not in any stable sense.

Distances stretched.

Folded.

Collapsed into each other depending on how you looked.

Mai didn't try to map it anymore.

That phase was over.

Now—

she was selecting.

“Left is shorter,” she said.

Ace didn't check.

Didn't verify.

She moved left.

Shammy didn't follow.

She moved right.

The room—

hesitated.

For a fraction of a second—

it didn't know which of them to prioritize.

That was enough.

Ace pushed forward—

through the uncertainty—

the statue in her hands flickering harder now—

lag increasing—

snap delay widening—

"...window expanding," she said.

Mai's voice came sharp.

"Don't measure it."

"Use it."

Behind them—

something resolved again.

Shammy felt it like a pressure spike—

sudden—

violent—

contained.

"...reset attempt," she said.

Mai didn't turn.

"Break it."

Shammy inhaled—

deep—

uneven—

The air fractured.

Not controlled.

Not clean.

Three different pressure fields—

colliding—

overlapping—

refusing to agree.

The system stuttered.

The statues—

flickered.

Not visually.

Relationally.

For a moment—

none of them occupied the same space twice.

Ace stepped through it.

Clean.

No resistance.

Then—

something changed.

Not outside.

Inside.

Mai felt it first.

Not as movement.

As surplus.

"...stop," she said.

Ace didn't.

"...what."

Mai's voice dropped.

"...count."

Silence.

Ace didn't hesitate.

"...four."

Shammy scanned.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

"...four."

Mai didn't answer.

Her eyes moved differently now.

Not across the statues.

Between them.

Tracking something that—

shouldn't be there.

"...again," she said.

Ace's voice stayed flat.

“...four.”

Shammy’s—
slower now—

“...four.”

Mai exhaled.

“...wrong.”

Silence.

Ace didn’t react.

“...why.”

Mai’s gaze sharpened.

Locked.

Focused—

not on a statue—

on the space between Ace and Shammy.

“...because we’re not counting the right thing,” she said.

A beat.

“...we’re counting shapes.”

The room shifted.

Not reacting.

Listening.

Shammy’s voice dropped.

“...what are we missing.”

Mai didn’t look away.

“...the condition.”

Silence.

Ace’s grip tightened.

Just enough.

“...say it.”

Mai's answer came slower.

Not because she didn't know.

Because she did.

"There aren't four objects," she said.

A beat.

"There are five states."

The room—

stopped.

Not physically.

Not visually.

But the pressure of decision—
vanished.

Ace didn't blink.

"...define."

Mai didn't hesitate.

"Observed."

A beat.

"Unobserved."

Another.

"Transition."

Shammy's breath hitched.

"...and the fourth."

Mai's eyes didn't move.

"Disagreement."

Silence.

Ace's voice dropped lower.

"...and the fifth."

Mai swallowed once.

Not fear.

Recognition.

"...observer."

Everything—

shifted.

Not the statues.

Not the room.

Them.

The weight of attention—

became visible.

Not as light.

Not as sound.

As presence.

Shammy felt it first.

Pressure—

not in the air—

in perception.

“...we’re part of it,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“We always were.”

Ace didn’t move.

Didn’t give anything.

“...then why four pedestals.”

Mai’s answer came immediately.

“Because the fifth doesn’t need one.”

Silence.

Then—

something impossible happened.

One of the statues—

did not move.

Did not shift.

Did not flicker.

But—

it was no longer separate
from the others.

The space between them—
collapsed.

Not physically.

Conceptually.

They were no longer four objects.

They were—

a system.

And the system—

included them.

Shammy's voice dropped.

"...we're the missing variable."

Mai didn't correct her.

"Not missing," she said.

A beat.

"Required."

Ace adjusted her stance.

The statue in her hands—

flickered harder—

not resisting—

integrating.

Her voice stayed flat.

“...then we stop being observers.”

Silence.

Mai looked at her.

Really looked.

“...you can't.”

Ace didn't blink.

“...watch me.”

She moved.

Not faster.

Not harder.

Differently.

Her gaze—

shifted.

Not away.

Not off.

Through.

The statue in her hands—

for a fraction of a second—

did not exist

as an object.

It existed—

as a possibility.

And in that possibility—

Ace stepped

past it.

Not around.

Not through.

Past.

The system—

failed to resolve.

For the first time—

completely.

Behind her—

the statues

did not reappear immediately.

Shammy's breath caught.

"...you broke it."

Mai's voice came slower.

Measured.

"...no."

A beat.

"...she removed herself from it."

Silence.

Ace didn't turn.

"...keep moving," she said.

Because now—

they understood.

They weren't transporting statues.

They weren't even transporting states.

They were transporting—

themselves

through a system
that only existed
as long as they agreed
to see it.

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