

Chapter 2 – Rule Set

The overhead bulb had finally given up. Only two lamps remained, throwing long shadows that made Shammy's height look even more impossible against the concrete walls. Rain kept its irregular rhythm on the glass. Inside, the air tasted metallic.

Mai moved first.

She crossed to the low table, swept the spent casings aside with one precise motion, and set her disruptor pistol down beside them—safety on, but close enough to remind everyone this was still their space. Silver-blue eyes scanned the room once, mapping distances, sightlines, clear floor. Then she turned to face the other two.

"Three initial games," she said. Voice even, carrying the quiet weight of someone laying foundation. "Rotating positions. No full vector overdrive. Safe-word is 'horizon.' Say it, everything stops. No questions."

Ace leaned against the arm of the couch, arms folded across her compact chest. Violet eyes steady. She gave one small nod. Already committed. The emerald katanas stayed propped where they were; this wasn't that kind of night.

Shammy stood near the center, 195 cm of restless grace. Her silver-white hair lifted in slow waves, faint ionized gradients shifting under the lamplight. Electric blue eyes practically sparked. She rocked once on the balls of her feet, temperature around her climbing a full three degrees. "Kid in a candy store still applies," she murmured, grin wide and unfiltered. "What's game one?"

Mai's lips curved—just the edge of a tease. "Hold. Simple. Each of us tries to keep the other two pinned by presence alone. No hands at first. No weapons. No slamming the room into a pressure cooker." She glanced at Shammy, silver-blue sharpening. "You especially. Dial it back until someone breaks the hold."

Ace pushed off the couch. One compact step brought her into the open space between them. She looked up at Shammy, then across at Mai. "I start it."

Shammy laughed low, the sound carrying a soft static crackle. "Of course you do."

Mai stepped in closer, forming the loose triangle. Her balanced frame moved with deliberate calm, but the way her silver hair caught the light said the curiosity had sharpened into something hungrier. "Rules inside the game: first one to move or speak concedes the round. Winner sets the next condition. We rotate until the energy bleeds off or someone calls horizon."

Shammy's grin didn't fade. If anything, it deepened. She spread her arms slightly, storm-carried frame loosening as if the air itself was making room for her. "I'm not calling anything tonight. Bring it."

Ace didn't answer with words. She simply shifted her weight—small, dense, intent compressed into every centimeter. The violet undertone in her eyes fractured a little brighter. She didn't touch either of them yet. Just stood there, presence like a blade held at rest.

Mai raised one hand, slow and measured. Fingers traced the air between them, not quite making contact. "Begin on my mark. Three... two..."

Shammy's hair rose fully now, charged arcs flickering at the tips. Temperature climbed again. The rain outside seemed to recede.

"One."

The room tightened.

Mai's hold came first—structural, invisible lines of legibility pressing against the other two without a single touch. Silver-blue eyes locked on Shammy's face, then Ace's, reading every micro-twitch.

Ace answered with pure kinetic density. She didn't move her feet, but the air around her small frame seemed to compress, pushing back against Mai's geometry like an immovable point.

Shammy's response rolled in like weather. No contact, yet the pressure field bloomed—warm, electric, wrapping around both smaller women in a slow wave that made skin prickle and breath catch. Her electric blue eyes half-lidded, grin turning lazy and storm-heavy. "Feels good already," she breathed, voice low.

Ace's jaw tightened. One small shift of her shoulders and the compression intensified, forcing Shammy's atmospheric wave to bend around her like wind around a cliff.

Mai exhaled through her nose, almost amused. "You're both cheating the spirit already."

Shammy laughed again—static threading through it. She leaned forward a fraction, tall frame looming without stepping. The pressure increased, hair brushing the ceiling now. "Can't help the weather."

Ace's violet eyes flicked up. Dry edge in her tone. "Weather's loud. Shut it down or I will."

For a moment the three of them held—Mai's precise mapping, Ace's dense refusal to yield, Shammy's rolling storm—all without a single hand laid. Sweat beaded at Ace's temple. Mai's breathing stayed measured but deeper. Shammy's cheeks carried a faint flush beneath the charge.

Then Ace moved. Not breaking the rules exactly—just accelerating them. One compact step forward, small hand finally rising to press flat against Shammy's sternum. Not hard. Just enough irreversible intent to pin the taller woman's next breath.

Shammy's eyes widened, electric blue flaring. A soft groan escaped, half laugh, half static pop. "That's cheating."

Mai's hand followed, sliding along Ace's shoulder blade, then curving to rest against Shammy's side—balancing the equation. "No. That's adapting."

The hold had broken into contact. The room felt smaller, warmer, charged in ways that had nothing to do with the raid anymore.

Mai's voice stayed calm, but the silver in her eyes had gone molten at the edges. "Round one to whoever makes the other two flinch first. Then we rotate properly."

Shammy's grin returned, hungry. "I'm not flinching."

Ace looked up at her, violet fractured and steady. "Neither am I."

Mai simply smiled—small, structural, promising.

“Game on, then.”

The rain kept falling outside. Inside, the rules were set, the triangle closed, and the first real pressure wave of the night had only just begun to crest.

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