

BLACK FILE — NIGHT CITY: EQUILIBRIUM TEST

The apartment smelled of ozone and cheap synth-rice drifting up from the street vendor below. Neon bled through the windows in shifting pinks and acid greens, painting the room in restless light.

Ace sat on the edge of a low table, cleaning the emitter housing of her left katana with slow, economical movements. Mai leaned against the counter, silver hair catching the glow like fractured chrome. Shammy stood by the window, tall, still, fingers tracing condensation in idle arcs.

Shammy spoke first, voice low, threaded with faint static.

“Been watching the streets. Distraction here is efficient. Disposable. Loud.”

A pause.

“We have eddies. We have time. So—each of us picks a joytoy. Separate rooms. Separate nights. No shared ledger. We test what this city sells.”

The cloth in Ace’s hand paused.

Mai’s eyebrow lifted. “You’re proposing we rent three professionals for stress-testing. In a city that monetizes organ failure.”

Shammy smiled faintly. “We’ve stabilized worse.”

Ace set the katana down. Violet eyes flicked between them.

“Joytoys don’t come with filters. You really want three strangers walking away with pieces of whatever we are?”

Silence held for a beat.

Mai crossed her arms, already mapping failure points. “Your concern isn’t the act. It’s the residue.”

Shammy tilted her head. “Maybe that’s exactly the point.”

Another pause.

Ace exhaled once, short.

“Fine. Not separate floors. Adjacent rooms. If something feels off, we pull the plug.”

Mai’s lips curved. “Irreversible action with training wheels.”

Shammy’s smile widened. “Good enough.”

Lizzie’s elevator was chrome and low red light, designed to make everyone look expensive. The air smelled of synthetic perfume and fresh installs.

“Three adjacent suites,” Mai said, fingers moving across a holo-interface. “No recording. No

monitoring. Extra charge for silence.”

Shammy glanced at Ace. “Still time to back out.”

Ace didn’t look at her. “Not the point.”

The central suite opened into a wide lounge overlooking the neon sprawl. A holographic menu bloomed above the table—profiles, specs, price tiers climbing into absurdity.

Shammy leaned forward first.

“This one,” she said, selecting a storm-modded male build. “Durable.”

Ace gave a small nod. “Smart.”

Mai’s voice was dry. “Try not to collapse the grid.”

Shammy confirmed.

Ace didn’t scroll long.

“Her. Quiet type. No questions.”

Mai studied the profile, then Ace. “Minimal variables.”

Ace shrugged once.

Mai chose last.

“High-intelligence companion,” she said. “Ritual-compatible.”

“Of course,” Ace muttered.

Three confirmations. Three soft chimes.

Shammy stood. “Twenty minutes.”

They split without ceremony.

Ace opened her door on the knock.

The woman was compact, precise, matte-black plating catching the low light. No hesitation in her eyes.

“Quiet type,” she said.

“Good,” Ace replied. “Skip the script.”

They moved without rush. No performance, no excess. Just controlled proximity, deliberate motion.

When the woman traced the faint fracture in Ace's eye, she didn't flinch.

"You carry storms too," she murmured.

Ace didn't answer. She just didn't pull away.

Shammy's room became weather.

Pressure rose and fell in controlled pulses, the air itself responding to her rhythm. Static danced across skin, temperature shifting in measured waves.

"Breathe," she said calmly. "I've got the pressure."

Her companion laughed through it—half exhilaration, half disbelief—but he held.

Shammy never lost control. Not once.

Mai's suite was quieter. Denser.

Conversation threaded through touch like code through circuitry. Her companion adapted in real time—mapping, responding, pushing just enough to keep up.

"You're calculating even now," the woman said softly.

"Habit," Mai replied.

"Then let one variable go."

Mai did.

Not collapse. Just release.

For a moment, structure yielded to something cleaner.

Hours passed.

Separate rooms. Separate rhythms.

The triad never spoke—but the connection held, stretched, intact.

Dawn came grey and artificial over Night City.

Ace moved first. Dressed. Armed. A stack of eddies left behind. No note.

Shammy stepped into the corridor next, calm pressure settled into something steady.

Mai joined them last, already reading the shifts.

They stood in silence for a beat.

Ace spoke first.

“City delivered.”

Shammy nodded. “Durable. Interesting gradients.”

Mai crossed her arms. “Structural integrity held.”

Ace glanced between them. “We still us?”

Mai tilted her head. “Bent. Not broken.”

Shammy rolled her shoulders, air warming slightly. “Equilibrium held.”

They moved together down the corridor, formation automatic.

The diner was loud, cheap, and mostly empty.

Ace took the corner seat, back to the wall.

“Debrief,” she said, wrapping her hands around a mug of something that pretended to be coffee. “Compact. Sharp. No unnecessary questions. Residue minimal. Clean enough.”

Mai nodded once. “Adaptive. Kept up. No structural risk. Worth the data.”

Shammy leaned back, faint static flickering.

“Durable. Responsive. Pressure cycle stable. No collapse.”

A short silence followed.

Ace exhaled, almost amused.

“Next time you get an idea like that—warn us before we’re already in the elevator.”

Shammy smiled. “Where’s the fun in that?”

Mai added, dry, “Next test, I pick the venue. Somewhere with better coffee.”

Ace lifted her mug slightly.

“Deal. But together next time.”

No argument.

Outside, rain started again, washing neon down the streets.

Inside, the triad finished their drinks and stepped back into the city.

Loose formation. No hesitation.

Edges tested.

Center intact.

END FILE

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