

RACE 04 — BELLE ISLE CIRCUIT Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #4 of 12 Location: Belle Isle Park, inner perimeter road — full island loop Conditions: February, 12:40 AM | Overcast, 1°C, road surface damp, fog over eastern shore Winner: Reyes — Chevrolet Corvette C8 Z06, race-prepared, matte black with red pinstripe

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Belle Isle sat in the river like something left behind.

Two kilometres of bridge off East Jefferson and suddenly the city was gone — not diminished, not receded, but gone, replaced by trees and parkland and the sound of the river on both sides at once. The island had been a park for a hundred and fifty years. It had a fountain, a nature center, a conservatory that had been repaired and re-repaired in cycles that matched the city's economic tide. At this hour, in February, with a thin fog sitting over the eastern shore and the park authority conspicuously absent, it was something else: a contained circuit with no exits except the bridge you came in on and the river on every other side.

The perimeter road ran approximately 4.8 kilometres around the island's interior edge. One complete loop. The Blacklist had chosen a five-lap circuit — nearly 24 kilometres total — which was longer than any previous event, long enough for strategy to matter as much as raw capability. Long enough for something to go wrong.

Eight cars had entered. The entry fee was higher than prior events. That had filtered some of the field.

Reyes ran a Corvette C8 Z06 that had been taken to a race shop and returned barely recognizable in terms of its internal architecture, though the exterior remained close to stock — this was a deliberate choice by someone who wanted it to blend until it didn't need to anymore. The Z06's flat-plane crank V8 produced a sound unlike the American V8 tradition — sharper, more European in character, a scream at high RPM rather than a rumble. Reyes was twenty-eight years old and had been running Blacklist events for three years. She had three prior wins. She had never been arrested, which was a fact she apparently considered both a professional and personal accomplishment.

The fog complicated the east shore section of the perimeter on every lap — approximately 700 metres where visibility dropped to the kind of levels that required choosing between speed and sight, and where the responsible choice was one that nobody in this field was particularly inclined to make.

Ace had taken one run around the island before the event, on foot, at a pace that attracted no comment from the few people still in the park at that hour. She covered the perimeter with the methodical attention she brought to everything, noting the surface variations, the two sections of mild negative camber on the northern arc, the way the fog concentrated over the eastern straightaway where the tree line broke and the river air came in uninterrupted. By the time she returned to the start line, she had the circuit mapped to a level of detail that no amount of looking at a diagram would have provided.

Mai had done the same thing differently — she'd sat in the DB11 with a topographic map of the island open on her tablet and cross-referenced the elevation data against satellite imagery until she had a picture of where the road's micro-geometry would cause grip variation under damp conditions. Shamy had stood on the bridge for ten minutes watching the fog, her hair barely moving despite the wind — which meant she was doing something with the air rather than just standing in it, though she said nothing about this when she came back.

“East section,” she said simply.

"I know," Mai said.

"Five laps. It'll thicken on lap three."

"You're certain?"

A pause. "The river is certain. I'm just telling you what it said."

Eight cars at the line. The signal was a radio-triggered light rig — green LED strip mounted to a temporary pole, activated from someone's phone two hundred metres back. It went green and the field moved.

The first lap was organizational. The eight cars found their order through the process of discovering who was willing to go where and how fast. The Corvette went to the front by the first northern bend and stayed there. Ace slotted the Nismo into second and ran the circuit at a measured pace, taking in the lap at race speed, updating her pre-race map with the reality of the surface under load and temperature. The DB11 ran fourth, which was comfortable — Mai was not giving this race to the field, she was absorbing it.

Lap two. The field compressed on the eastern section, the fog not yet a major factor but already a presence, a smear of white at the periphery of headlight range that shortened the horizon and required everyone to make the same calculation: commit to the line you'd chosen before you could see its far end, or hesitate, and if you hesitate, you lose. The Corvette committed. The Nismo committed. The DB11 committed.

One of the other cars — a tuned RS6 Avant that had been impressive on the northern arc — hesitated at the fog section's entry on lap two and lost two positions in the seconds it took to recover confidence.

Lap three. The fog thickened exactly as Shammy had said it would.

The eastern section went from an obstacle to a challenge to something that required genuine courage to navigate at race speed. Visibility dropped to fifteen metres. Headlights became a wall of reflected white rather than illumination. Ace ran the section on the map she'd made on foot — surface memory, geometry memory, the knowledge of where the road bent and how sharply and how the camber lay at the apex of each bend, none of it visible, all of it known. The Nismo held its line through the fog with a precision that had nothing to do with sight.

The Corvette emerged from the eastern section first. Reyes had run it well, but she'd run it on reflex and experience rather than prior knowledge of this specific surface, and the difference was a fraction of a second slower per fog-section pass than Ace was running. Not enough to change the position. Not yet.

The DB11 came through the fog section on lap three and Mai's line was so clean through the blind section that one of the spectators standing at the fog boundary — four people had risked the cold to watch from the bridge — said afterward that it looked like the car knew where it was going before the road revealed it.

Shammy had said nothing during the lap. She'd sat with one hand on the ceiling grip and her eyes slightly unfocused in a way that wasn't inattention — it was the way she looked when she was listening to something the instruments didn't measure.

Lap four. Reyes began to pull.

The Corvette found speed on the northern arc that it hadn't been using — Reyes had been managing the event, it became clear, the way experienced circuit runners managed events. She'd been running at what she needed to run to hold position, and on lap four she stopped doing that. The gap between the Z06 and the Nismo extended from one car length to three in the space of the back straight, and Ace registered this not as a problem to be immediately solved but as information about what Reyes was capable of when she committed to it.

The Nismo answered on the eastern fog section. Ace ran it half a second faster than every previous lap — not possible by any principle that required sight, only possible because she was operating on a level of environmental internalization that translated the circuit from external geography to internal fact. She came out of the fog with the gap to the Corvette reduced by two car lengths.

Reyes extended again on the northern arc of lap five. A longer pull, the Z06's flat-plane V8 at its absolute register, the sound of it piercing through the fog from a distance in a way that made two people on the bridge cover their ears. She had measured the field and found the margin she needed and she was now using it, spending what she'd saved, and she crossed the finish line first by three car lengths with the Corvette already decelerating, Reyes's posture behind the wheel unchanged from the first lap — controlled, upright, spending nothing on expression.

Ace crossed second. The DB11 came third.

On the bridge, Mai stepped out first and looked back at the eastern shore where the fog sat over the road, still thick, indifferent.

“She saved the acceleration for the final lap,” Mai said.

Shammy stepped out beside her. “So did we.”

A silence between them that was not uncomfortable.

“Not quite enough,” Mai said.

“No,” Shammy agreed. “But we learned where the margin lives.” She looked across the island toward where Reyes had already stopped the Corvette and was standing beside it in the dark, not accepting congratulations, simply standing. “And so did she. That she needed all of lap five to hold us.”

That was the detail that mattered. Reyes had won. But she'd needed everything she had to do it.

Four races. One win for Ace. Three losses between them. The Blacklist was not handing anything away.

Shammy turned and looked at the river — the fog, the dark water, the far shore. The air moved around her in a way that was not quite the same as wind.

“Next time,” she said, to no one in particular.

The island didn't answer. But nothing about it felt impossible anymore. —

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Last update: **16/03/2026 17:38**

