

RACE 08 — DEAD FREIGHT Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #8 of 12 Location: Port of Detroit, container terminal — internal freight road network Conditions: April, 1:30 AM | Clear sky, 14°C, surface damp from earlier rain, crane lights active Winner: Reyes — Chevrolet Corvette C8 Z06, race-prepared, matte black

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The port moved things. That was its purpose and it committed to that purpose twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, without sentiment or ceremony. The cranes stood at intervals along the quay like enormous, indifferent sentinels, their overhead booms lit against the dark, the container stacks arranged in coloured rows that went ten high and stretched hundreds of metres in every direction in a labyrinth of steel and compressed commercial necessity. The air smelled of brine and lubricant and somewhere underneath those things, very faintly, of whatever had been inside the containers most recently — a rotating inventory of the world's goods passing through a point on the Detroit River that geography had made significant and commerce had kept that way.

The freight road network inside the terminal was not designed for this. That was almost a compliment to the people who had seen its potential: the internal roads were wide — necessarily, for the vehicles that worked them — surfaced in heavy asphalt patched over years into a mosaic of different materials and temperatures, lit at intervals by the overhead crane lights which cast a working, angular illumination rather than the clean overhead wash of a proper racing venue. The terminal lights moved when the cranes moved, which meant the lighting was, at intervals, dynamic. A section of road that was well-lit one moment could be in shadow the next if a crane boom rotated. This was not considered a problem by the organizers. It was considered a feature.

The course was not a simple circuit. It was a cargo-road rally — three waypoints marked by coloured strobes mounted to temporary poles, each requiring the driver to navigate the terminal network between them in sequence, the total effective route approximately 7 kilometres one-way before the return to the start. There were no gates, no closed sections, no course furniture beyond the strobes. The terminal's geometry was the track. Dead ends existed. Wrong turns existed. The terminal had been mapped and handed to participating drivers on paper cards the night before — a printed schematic with the waypoint positions marked and the recommended route in dotted line. Recommended. Not required.

Five cars had entered. The entry fee for this event was higher again — the port access had cost something and the something had been passed downstream to the participants.

Reyes came back, her Corvette Z06 at the start position with the engine running in warm-up and its driver standing beside it studying a laminated copy of the terminal schematic with the focus of someone who had committed the recommended route to memory three days ago and was now looking for the deviation that would be faster. She found two. She kept this information to herself, which was not a hostile act so much as a professional one. Reyes was not unfriendly. She was simply in the habit of winning and had developed the habits that supported that.

Viktor Drach had declined this event — or had not been invited, depending on whose version you took. His ZL1 was not built for the navigational complexity of cargo road rallying. Viktor raced straight lines. This was not a straight line.

Kade Mors was here. The matte-orange GT-R at the secondary position, Kade having attached a secondary strobe pack to his car's front end to address the lighting variability — a pragmatic modification that the adjudication team reviewed and approved since it didn't affect vehicle specification. A Nissan running extra lights was still a Nissan.

And Ace. And the DB11.

Ace had studied the terminal map for ninety minutes the previous night, cross-referencing it against port authority public records for crane operating schedules and container placement cycles. This was technically available information. She had obtained it through channels that required no particular effort to describe and the results had given her a sense of the terminal's dynamic geography — not just where things were, but where they would be at 1:30 AM on this specific date. Container moves that might affect the freight road widths. Crane positions that would determine the lighting in specific sections.

She had marked three deviations on her map. Not the two Reyes had found. Three different ones.

Mai had done something Shammy considered entirely typical: she had spent four hours on port logistics databases and come to the event knowing the weight distribution of the container stacks in every row adjacent to the race route. “In case of contact,” she'd said, when Shammy asked, and Shammy had decided not to ask what contact she was anticipating.

“The third waypoint is a trap,” Shammy said at the start line, the DB11 idling low while Mai reviewed her terminal schematic one last time.

“Define trap,” Mai said.

“The recommended route takes you past the crane six operating corridor at — ” she checked the time — “1:47 AM, which is midway through the east section. Crane six runs a container shift at 1:48. The boom will cross the road.”

Mai looked at her. “You calculated a crane schedule.”

“I didn't calculate it. I felt when the machines would move.” A pause. “Then Kade confirmed it when I asked him.”

A small silence.

“So Kade knows,” Mai said.

“Kade knows about crane six. He doesn't know that the bypass road behind container row 14 is clear and runs parallel. I checked it on foot.”

“When did you check it on foot?”

“Earlier.”

“When earlier?”

Shammy looked out at the terminal. “The security shift changes at 1 AM. There's a gap of eleven minutes.”

Mai set down the schematic. “You walked the port terminal during a security gap.”

“I walked part of it. The relevant part.” She met Mai's expression of measured exasperation with complete equanimity. “We need to win this one.”

The green light.

All five cars moved into the terminal network simultaneously, which immediately produced the navigational pressure that cargo road rallying was designed to create — the routes branched quickly, the first junction appearing eighty metres from the start, and the five cars made their first navigational choices in real time. Reyes went right. Kade went left. Ace went straight — a freight road that wasn't on the recommended route at all, narrower, running between two container stacks at a width that left approximately a metre of clearance on each side of the Nismo, but cutting a clean line toward the first waypoint that was two hundred metres shorter than either branching option.

The crowd at the start couldn't follow the cars once they entered the terminal. They listened.

The first waypoint strobe went off — registered by the marshals — in Reyes's sequence first: she reached it first by approximately eight seconds, having run her first deviation clean. Kade's strobe registered twelve seconds later. Ace's twenty-two seconds after that.

But the Nismo's strobe at waypoint one registered from a direction that the marshals' position map didn't show a road running through. They noted this and said nothing. The Blacklist adjudication team had a phrase for this: valid by completion. If you reached the waypoint, the route you'd used to reach it was considered valid unless course furniture had been removed or other competitors obstructed.

The Nismo's tight-clearance freight road shaved time on the approach but required reduction in speed through the container passage — Ace running the Nismo at a pace dictated by the metre of clearance on each side, which was enough, which was precisely enough, and she came out the far end of the container corridor into the wider road approaching waypoint one with the car unscathed and the route proven.

The second section ran toward the quay edge and then north along it — this was the crane corridor section. Kade ran it slightly ahead of the field and felt the crane six movement coming as a change in ambient sound rather than a visual warning: the groan of the counterweight, the adjustment of the boom overhead. He braked, stopped, waited twelve seconds while the boom crossed the road at a height of approximately four metres and moved to its operating position over a stack, then proceeded. Twelve seconds. He'd known it was coming and still had to stop.

Reyes didn't know crane six was moving. She came through the section after Kade with the confidence of someone who had memorized the route rather than the environment, and she reached the crane corridor to find it clear — crane six had already completed its boom transit. She passed through without incident and without understanding what had almost not been the case.

The DB11 reached the crane corridor via the bypass road behind container row 14, which ran parallel to the main corridor at a distance of forty metres and connected back to the main route on the far side of the crane's operating radius. Mai ran the bypass clean, Shammy navigating from memory of her late-night reconnaissance, and they arrived back on the main route already past crane six with no interruption and no lost seconds.

Kade had lost twelve seconds. This was decisive.

Waypoint two registered: Reyes first. DB11 second. Kade third. Ace — where was Ace?

The Nismo appeared at waypoint two four seconds after the DB11, coming from a road that again defied simple mapping — she'd found another deviation that cut through the container matrix via a service road meant for forklift traffic, wider than the first corridor but still requiring the Nismo to abandon any pretense of maximum speed for approximately 400 metres of navigational precision.

DB11 second, Nismo fourth at waypoint two. The deviations were working in aggregate but the

DB11's bypass had been structurally superior.

The third waypoint was the longest section. The recommended route ran southeast through the terminal toward the far quay edge. Ace's marked deviation on this section took a freight road that cut diagonally through the container matrix — shorter in total distance, but requiring passage through an area she'd flagged in the port records as a high-turnover container movement zone, which meant the surface might have changed from what the records showed.

It had changed. The diagonal freight road she'd chosen had a container placed across it — moved earlier that evening, sitting at an angle that blocked the full width.

The Nismo reached it, assessed it in approximately half a second, and turned back. The reverse cost forty seconds. She found the recommended route and ran it.

The third waypoint registered in sequence: Reyes first, Kade second, DB11 third, Nismo fourth.

The return to the start from the third waypoint was free-route — shortest path each driver could find back to the start line. Reyes ran the recommended return. Kade ran his second deviation, which was good but not enough to recover the crane gap. The DB11 came back via the bypass system Shammy knew, adding speed on the clear quay access road.

Reyes crossed the start line first. She had been first at every waypoint, run clean deviations, and benefited once from crane timing she hadn't known to account for.

Kade crossed second after a determined return run.

The DB11 crossed third. Clean. Strategic. The bypass approach had made third possible from a field position that should have been fifth.

Ace crossed fourth. The blocked freight road had been the difference between third and a result she'd been building toward.

Reyes accepted her envelope at the start line and studied the terminal schematic one more time, circling a section near the quay edge. Making notes for next time.

In the DB11, Shammy said nothing for a long moment. Then: "Third."

"Third," Mai confirmed.

"We could have been second." She paused. "If I'd told you about crane six and the bypass earlier, you'd have run it from the start of the second section instead of finding it on the approach."

"You told me in time," Mai said.

"Barely."

"Barely is enough." She was quiet for a moment, the terminal lights moving overhead as the cranes resumed their work. "Ace's road was blocked."

"She'll have it clean next time," Shammy said. Not wishful — analytical. If the container had been moved temporarily, it could be moved back, or the route could be recalculated around it. Ace would do exactly that.

"Four events left," Mai said. "And Reyes has two wins."

They both understood what that meant. Reyes was accumulating. The Blacklist's closing events would be contested by whoever had shown the most consistent capability across the full series, and Reyes had shown it.

But the DB11 had shown it differently — not the same wins, not the same approaches, but a consistent pattern of reading the event within the event, of finding the decision underneath the obvious decision, and acting on it.

Shammy watched the cranes move in the dark above them, enormous and unhurried, doing their necessary work in the necessary way.

“Next time,” she said, “we find every deviation before we arrive.”

“Yes,” Mai said.

“Together.”

“Yes,” Mai said again, and started the car. —

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