

RACE 09 — TRIAD PROTOCOL Detroit Blacklist Underground | Event #9 of 12 Location: Hamtramck — Caniff Avenue to Joseph Campau, full district loop Conditions: April, 10:45 PM | Overcast, 17°C, dry, humid Winner: The Triad — Ace (Nismo 270) + Mai & Shammy (DB11), team classification

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The Blacklist had a rule that most of its participants had never triggered because most of its participants ran solo.

The rule was this: if two or more cars from a single registered entry crossed the finish together — within three seconds of each other — and that entry had declared team status before the event, the result could be classified as a team win. The intent behind the rule had been to accommodate relay formats. It had never been used for simultaneous multi-car strategy. There was nothing in the rules that explicitly prohibited it.

The Triad had filed team registration four days before event nine.

Ace had proposed it in fewer words than the sentence takes to describe. They had been standing in the staging garage after the Dead Freight debrief, the three of them, and she'd looked at the Blacklist entry form on Mai's tablet and said: "Team class. Next event." That was the entirety of the proposal. Mai had looked at it for twelve seconds and then marked the entry. Shammy had said "yes" before Mai finished marking.

The entry went in. The Blacklist adjudication team confirmed the registration and attached no conditions beyond the three-second crossing window. No one had thought to attach conditions because no one had done this before.

The Hamtramck district loop was a city-within-the-city event — Hamtramck sat as an independent municipality surrounded entirely by Detroit, its own governance and street grid in a space of approximately 10 square kilometres. The loop course used Caniff Avenue, Joseph Campau, and the grid between them in a roughly oval configuration of approximately 3.2 kilometres, run for four laps. The streets were narrow by comparison to the Woodward drag or the Jefferson riverfront — two lanes plus parking width in most sections, with one stretch on Joseph Campau that was wide enough to consider passing and one section on Caniff that was absolutely not.

Six cars total. The regular field was partially absent — Sable had not entered, and her absence was unexplained. Reyes was present. Viktor Drach was present, the ZL1 sitting at the grid with an air of something having been decided. Kade Mors's GT-R made its fourth consecutive appearance. A new entry: a Lotus Emira, heavily modified and running a custom livery that suggested professional racing background somewhere in its history.

The two Triad cars sat side by side at the grid: the Nismo 270 in its deep matte bruise-colour, the DB11 in steel blue that caught the Hamtramck streetlights and held them. Next to each other they were a study in contrast — the compact Japanese precision of the Nismo against the long grand touring authority of the Aston Martin, nothing visually linking them except the intention behind both of them.

The crowd in Hamtramck was local. Tight-packed on the sidewalks at the straight sections, absent from the narrow curves where nobody wanted to be if something went wrong. They understood the format of what was happening without being told: two cars, same entry, team flag on the registration. Several of them understood why this was interesting and several of them had already formed opinions about whether it would work. None of their opinions were sought.

The plan was simple because it had to be simple. Complex plans required communication infrastructure that the Blacklist didn't permit — no radios between cars, no earpieces, no visible signals. They had worked out the strategy in the staging garage using an approach that was half tactical and half something that existed in the triad's operational dynamic and had no clean vocabulary: Ace ran interference. Mai and Shammy ran fast. At the end of lap four, the three-second window was the goal.

“Interference” meant different things at different points in the race. In practice it meant that the Nismo 270 would position itself — not illegally, not by contact, but by placement and timing — to manage what the cars behind the DB11 could do. Ace was fast enough to run in the leading group genuinely. She was not going to sacrifice her lap time for the team result unless the race required it. The plan had an honest core: run both cars as fast as they could be run, and if the race math produced a three-second window at the finish, take it. If it didn't, take the best individual results available.

Green.

The Hamtramck loop tightened the field immediately. Viktor Drach's ZL1 had been built for a different kind of event and the width of the Caniff sections produced a frustration that transmitted itself into driving style — Viktor was fast but repeatedly blocked by geometry, the wide Camaro unwilling to fit the available space the way the smaller cars could. He ran third and it was clear that third was not the result of strategic management but of genuine constraint.

Reyes in the Corvette ran first through the opening lap, reading the Hamtramck streets with the same prior-work discipline she brought to every event. Kade ran second, the GT-R compact enough to use the Joseph Campau wide section and find lines through Caniff that the bigger cars couldn't access.

Ace ran fourth. The Nismo was completely at home in these streets — compact, precise, a car that seemed designed for exactly this kind of grid. She ran fourth and she was not running hard. This was noted by Kade, who glanced in his mirror and saw the Nismo sitting three car lengths back and apparently comfortable.

The DB11 ran fifth. It should have been sixth — the Lotus Emira had squeezed past at the first Caniff section — but Mai had anticipated the pass attempt and moved to block it, legally, which had surprised the Lotus driver who was running an aggressive opening lap. The DB11 was fifth and moving with the methodical intelligence that Mai applied to circuits: not sprinting, mapping.

Shammy was tracking Viktor Drach.

She wasn't watching him, exactly. She was feeling the pressure of the ZL1 through the air between them — the particular turbulence of a large V8 American muscle car in a narrow European-grid city district, the way it disturbed the local atmosphere differently than any of the other cars. She could tell without looking when Viktor was going to try something aggressive, because the air changed slightly before he committed.

“Viktor will push on the Joseph Campau straight, lap two,” she said.

“Into second?” Mai asked.

“Into anywhere he can. He's frustrated with the geometry.”

“Then we use it.”

Lap two. Viktor pushed on Joseph Campau, exactly as Shammy had read. He went from third to second past Kade with a move that was legitimate and carried the particular energy of something that had been building for a full lap of constraint. The ZL1 surged on the wide section with the authority of its power advantage, and it was the correct decision for Viktor.

It was also the decision that opened a gap behind Kade, because Kade's natural following distance for Viktor collapsed when Viktor accelerated past him, and the space that appeared in Kade's wake was exactly the space the Nismo needed.

Ace moved from fourth to third in that gap. Clean, immediate, without apparent effort.

The DB11 moved from fifth to fourth as the Lotus Emira, having watched Viktor's move on Kade, tried to execute its own push on Kade's now-exposed rear — and found Ace's Nismo in the position it had previously occupied, blocking the inside line, not illegally, not by contact, simply present in the space the Lotus needed. The Lotus stayed fifth.

Lap three. The field was compressed in a way that the first two laps hadn't produced. Viktor first, Kade second, Ace third, DB11 fourth, Lotus fifth. Viktor's ZL1 was generating the kind of pace that acknowledged no obstacle — he'd found the rhythm of the narrow grid that had frustrated him in lap one and was now working with it rather than against it, and the gap to second was extending.

Kade ran second honestly, the GT-R exactly the right car for these streets, its driver in rhythm with the Hamtramck loop in a way that suggested he'd run it before, maybe many times, maybe not on the Blacklist but somewhere that used this geometry.

Ace sat behind him and did not try to pass. This was a decision. She was running a pace that matched Kade's without pushing past it, and from the DB11 two positions back, Mai watched the Nismo's brake lights through the Hamtramck grid and understood: Ace was managing the gap between second and fourth. Holding the space. Making sure the DB11 stayed in a window that could be closed by the end of lap four.

Shammy understood it differently: she felt the distance between the two cars as something being actively maintained, the Nismo a fixed point in the geometry of the race rather than a car fighting for position, and there was something in that deliberate stillness that moved her in a way she didn't entirely have vocabulary for.

“She's holding it for us,” Shammy said.

“She's holding it for the result,” Mai said, and it was not a contradiction.

Lap four. Viktor Drach opened the lead to six car lengths and the conclusion of the race became clear: Viktor would win this event, doing what he was built to do when the geometry finally cooperated, or at least cooperated enough. This was accepted.

What was not yet decided was everything behind him.

Kade held second with genuine effort — he could see the DB11 in his mirror now, closer than it had been at the start of the lap, and he knew what the team registration meant. He ran the Hamtramck grid at the edge of his available speed, Joseph Campau wide section used to its maximum, Caniff negotiated with the precision of someone who had been doing this for a long time.

Ace let Kade go at the start of lap four. A conscious decision, executed by simply not using the speed she had been holding back. The Nismo fell back from Kade's bumper to three car lengths, to five, to

seven. Kade felt the gap open and focused on his own race. He was running second and that was what mattered.

The DB11 moved up. With Ace no longer blocking the space between third and fourth, there was a pocket ahead of the Nismo that Mai accelerated into — not a pass on Ace, but a formation, the two cars suddenly in convoy, separated by two car lengths, running the final half-lap of Hamtramck together.

The Lotus Emira tried to follow. But the DB11's acceleration out of the Caniff section blocked the available road with its width, legally, inevitably, and the Lotus fell back to the gap it had been occupying since lap two.

The finish line.

Viktor Drach crossed first. Six car lengths clear, the ZL1's supercharger doing what it was designed to do, and Viktor Drach doing what he was designed to do, and the two of them arriving at the conclusion of a race that had been theirs since halfway through lap three.

Kade crossed second, the GT-R holding every metre of the gap he'd built.

And then the Nismo and the DB11 crossed the finish line together — Ace first by exactly one second and seven tenths, the Nismo's nose crossing the chalk while the DB11 was already on the run-off, and the crowd registered what had just happened before the adjudication team confirmed it.

Team classification.

The Nismo, first within the team. The DB11, second within the team. Both within the three-second window. Both under the same team registration.

The Blacklist adjudication team reviewed the crossing timestamps. Reviewed the team registration. Reviewed the rule. Confirmed: Team Triad, classified winner of event nine by team category.

Individual result: Viktor Drach first, Kade Mors second, Ace third, Mai & Shammy fourth. Team result: Triad, by rule, classified first — a distinct category that existed alongside the individual standings and had been invoked tonight for the first time in Blacklist history.

Viktor Drach looked at the result sheet for a long moment. He said nothing. He got in the ZL1 and drove away, which was a form of acknowledgment.

Kade accepted his second-place result with good humour and something that looked like respect, which was the correct response to something being done for the first time in a way that was entirely within the rules and entirely unpredicted.

The three of them stood beside their cars in the Hamtramck streets at nearly midnight, the neighbourhood around them quiet again, the crowd dispersing into the side streets and back to whatever the evening had been before this.

Ace stood between the two cars. She didn't do anything to mark the moment. She didn't have to.

Shammy sat on the DB11's hood — carefully, with the awareness of someone who knew her weight and the car's tolerance for it — and looked at the finish line chalk still visible in the streetlight.

“First time,” she said.

“First time,” Mai confirmed, leaning against the door.

Ace looked at them both. “Three events left,” she said.

It was not a reminder. It was what came next.

The chalk sat on the Hamtramck street and the city did what it always did: continued without comment. The Triad had done something new tonight and the night had contained it, the way nights contain most things, with indifference and perfect adequacy.

Three events left. The Blacklist was almost done.

They were not. —

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