

## CHAPTER 10 — CASE FILE NOTE: “STRUCTURE PERSISTS”

They didn't “debrief” in the way people imagined debriefs.

There was no dramatic room, no wall of monitors, no red-string board with photos and dates. Not here. Not with this file. The Foundation had learned—slowly, painfully—that the wrong kind of documentation turned ΔF-SRS-118 into a living problem.

So they did the safe version.

They withdrew from the cabin to the edge of the clearing, far enough that the porch didn't feel like it was leaning in, close enough that the structure remained in sight. They kept their voices low. They kept their words thin. They kept their attention distributed so nothing in the scene could become the center of worship.

Mai sat on an equipment case with her clipboard on her knees. She didn't write immediately. She let her hands rest. She let her nervous system settle into a slow rhythm that wasn't governed by anticipation.

Ace stood to her left, arms folded, gaze scanning the tree line and the cabin in alternating sweeps. She looked like she was guarding Mai from her own instincts as much as from the site itself.

Shammy stood behind them, slightly apart, head turned as if she could hear something in the distance.

She couldn't.

And that continued to irritate her.

After ten quiet minutes, Mai spoke first.

“Two confirmed events,” she said, and her tone was deliberately flat. “One shared object appearance and absence. One non-shared object perception.”

Ace didn't correct the phrasing. She could have—Ace loved sharper language—but she didn't. She understood why Mai was sanding the edges off.

Shammy's gaze remained on the clearing.

“And one window light,” Shammy added softly.

Mai nodded. “Yes. Window light. No pursuit. No source identified.”

Ace exhaled through her nose.

“This place doesn't escalate,” Ace said. “It... offers.”

Mai's pen moved, but she stopped it mid-stroke.

Ace had used a word too close to intent.

Mai looked up. “We don't assign motive.”

Ace's jaw tightened, then relaxed.

“Fine,” Ace said. “It produces.”

Shammy’s lips pressed together. “It places.”

Mai almost winced at the language, but she let it pass. Shammy wasn’t being poetic. She was being precise in the only way she had.

Mai wrote a few lines, sparse, clean. She kept each sentence short enough that it couldn’t sprout implications.

Structure confirmed. Interior stable across two entries. Observed: temporary paper (shared) → absent on return. Observed: bound volume (non-shared; Mai only) → absent on re-check. Observed: window light (night) → absent. No contact. No vocalization. No search behaviors initiated.

She paused, then added something that felt like it belonged in a file note rather than a narrative:

Behavioral shift noted: active non-participation maintained.

Ace watched her write that last line.

“We’re already changing,” Ace said quietly.

Mai didn’t look up. “We are adapting.”

Ace’s voice sharpened slightly. “Same thing.”

Mai capped her pen. “Different framing.”

Ace stared at her for a beat, then gave a slow nod, conceding the point without liking it.

Shammy’s attention snapped abruptly to the cabin.

Not because something moved.

Because something didn’t.

“The cabin,” Shammy said.

Mai’s spine straightened. “What?”

Shammy didn’t answer immediately. She was listening to nothing again, but the nothing had texture now, like cloth pulled tight.

“It’s still,” Shammy said. “But it’s... more aware.”

Ace’s hand flexed once, instinctively. “Pressure?”

Shammy shook her head, frustrated. “No. No pressure. That’s what I mean.”

Mai looked toward the cabin. It sat in the trees like a fact. The door was closed now. She couldn’t remember closing it.

She didn’t say that.

She refused to let her mind start making a list of “did we” and “didn’t we.” That list was another

thread.

Instead she asked the safe question.

“Is it still present?” Mai asked.

Ace’s eyes narrowed. “Yes.”

Shammy nodded. “Yes.”

Mai exhaled slowly.

They held their positions. No retreat yet. No sudden movement. If the cabin wanted them to react, they would deny it the satisfaction.

Minutes passed.

Nothing changed.

And yet Mai felt her attention being tugged in tiny increments, like a fisherman testing line without committing to a pull.

She stood, slowly, and walked a few paces away from the equipment cases, toward the edge of the clearing—not toward the cabin, but sideways, breaking the implicit axis the place seemed to keep trying to create between them and the structure.

Ace tracked her movement and mirrored it slightly, staying close without crowding her.

Shammy shifted too, keeping a triangle rather than a line.

Mai stopped near a tree trunk and rested her hand against the bark, grounding herself in something that had texture, scent, history. The bark smelled like tree. The first real smell she’d had since arriving.

It made her almost angry with relief.

She closed her eyes briefly, then opened them again.

“I’m going to send a note,” she said.

Ace’s brows lifted. “Now?”

Mai nodded once. “Minimal. No story.”

Ace didn’t argue. “To Havel?”

Mai hesitated—not because of uncertainty, but because of procedure. Bright’s sign-off had been the gate. Havel was the conduit. The file was the thing that didn’t want to be talked about.

“Havel,” Mai confirmed. “He routes it.”

She pulled a small secure comm unit from her pocket. No display bigger than a thumbnail. No fancy interface. The kind of device that did one thing and did it quietly.

Mai typed, slowly, choosing words like they were pieces of glass she didn’t want to cut herself on.

TO: Dr. Havel (via secure channel) CC: Dr. Bright (formal) SUBJECT: ΔF-SRS-118 — Initial Field Note (Day 1)

CONTENT: Structure confirmed at coordinates. Exterior consistent. Interior dimensions consistent. No pressure/pull detected (Ace); no drift vectors detected (Shamaterazu). Observed phenomena:

Temporary paper object (shared observation) present Day 1 → absent Day 2. No search conducted.

Bound volume perceived by Mai only (non-shared) on table → absent on re-check. No contact.

Window light observed overnight (no source) → absent at dawn. Protocol adhered: no vocalization, no replay, no object engagement, no forced consensus. Recommendation: continue phased observation; prioritize non-participation behavior.

She sent it and immediately put the device away, as if leaving it out would invite a reply she didn't want on-site.

Ace watched her.

"That's clean," Ace said.

Mai nodded, once. "It has to be."

Shammy's gaze stayed on the cabin.

Mai looked at the structure again and felt the strange, quiet truth settle into her bones:

This wasn't a case that wanted to kill them quickly.

This was a case that wanted to teach them to walk differently.

Mai turned back toward the equipment cases and spoke in the same flat tone she'd used all morning.

"We proceed to Phase I conclusion," she said. "Confirm persistence. Confirm that our non-participation holds. No escalation attempts."

Ace's mouth twisted. "Meaning we keep being boring."

Mai met her eyes. "Yes."

Ace's lips quirked, almost a smile—sharp, brief.

"Fine," Ace said. "I can do boring."

Shammy didn't smile. She didn't need to.

"I can do still," Shammy murmured, as if making a vow.

Mai picked up her clipboard and closed it.

They began packing, not as a retreat, but as a repositioning. They would keep the cabin in sight. They would keep the structure confirmed. They would keep their own behavior stable.

Because in this file, the most meaningful victory on Day 1 was simple:

They had observed the cabin.

And the cabin had not yet managed to make them do something stupid.—

© 2025-2026. “World of Ace, Mai and Shammy” and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

**Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.**

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

From:

<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace18:chapter10>

Last update: **31/03/2026 16:21**

