

# ACE 20 — Structural Override

## Act II — The Impact (Finalized)

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### 1. The Shot That Didn't Care

It missed.

But not the way things usually miss.

—

The insurgent had the line. You could see it—clean posture, controlled squeeze, no panic in the wrist. The kind of shot that either hits or at least goes somewhere predictable.

This one...

...just didn't feel like it.

—

The bullet left the barrel properly.

Then halfway through—

—it lost interest.

—

It drifted.

Not sharply. Not dramatically. Just a slight, lazy curve like it had somewhere else to be.

—

Badger blinked.

<blockquote>

"...did anyone else see that."

</blockquote>

—

No one answered.

Mostly because they had.

—

The round hit the containment door.

Soft.

Late.

Like the sound had to catch up to it.

—

The door didn't react.

But something behind it did.

—

## **2. No Explosion. Just... a Pause**

Nothing blew.

No flash.

No pressure wave.

No cinematic payoff.

—

The world just...

...took a second.

—

Sound didn't cut out.

It got forgotten.

—

Someone fired again—Rhee, maybe—but there was no noise attached to it. Just the motion. The recoil. A silent action with no confirmation it had ever happened.

—

The lights stretched.

Not flickering.

Not dimming.

Just slightly... longer than they should be.

—

Like something tried to correct them—

—and let go too early.

—

Shammy stepped back.

Actually stepped back.

“...nope.”

—

She pushed—instinctively—

—

the air didn't respond.

—

That alone snapped her expression tight.

—

Grouse tilted his head, slow, like he was trying to line something up that refused to stay still.

“...this isn't the same room anymore.”

—

### **3. Mai Doesn't Move**

Everyone adjusted.

Tiny shifts. Weight changes. That unconscious recalibration people do when something feels off.

—

Mai didn't.

—

It wasn't dramatic.

Didn't look intentional.

—

It looked like she just hadn't been told to continue yet.

—

Ace closed in fast—habit, instinct, doesn't matter—

—and stopped short.

—

Not because she hesitated.

—

Because the distance didn't agree.

—

Her hand hovered.

Close.

Close enough that it should have made contact.

Didn't.

—

Ace frowned.

Tried again—

stepped in—

—

and the space refused to close.

—

"...okay."

A beat.

"...no, I don't like that."

—

Mai inhaled sharply.

Held it.

Then let it go.

—

“...hold.”

—

Ace:

<blockquote>

“yeah, not loving that word right now”

</blockquote>

—

## 4. The First “No”

Gunfire resumed.

Because of course it did.

Nobody gets a briefing for this kind of thing.

—

Three rounds.

Straight line.

—

They stopped.

—

No shimmer.

No field.

No visible cause.

—

They just...

...refused.

—

Badger leaned sideways, peering at them like they might explain themselves.

<blockquote>

“...I hate this already”

</blockquote>

—

He waved a hand in front of one.

Nothing.

—

The bullets just hung there, spinning slowly, like time had misplaced them.

—

Mai looked at them.

Not confused.

Not alarmed.

—

Just... evaluating.

—

Then, quietly:

<blockquote>

“No.”

</blockquote>

—

The bullets dropped.

Not fell.

Dropped.

—

Like something re-enabled gravity instead of allowing it.

—

They hit the floor with a perfectly normal sound.

Which somehow made it worse.

—

## 5. People React Like People

One of the Foundation agents swore under his breath.

Another one didn't move at all.

Just stared.

—

"...what the hell is that."

—

No one had an answer.

Which, for Site-19, was saying something.

—

Shammy moved again, slower this time.

Like she was walking into a storm she couldn't feel properly.

—

She tried again—

—

pressure adjustment—

—

nothing.

—

Her eyes narrowed.

"...Mai."

—

No response.

—

Ace shifted her stance, testing her footing.

It felt... off.

Not unstable.

Just slightly wrong.

—

Like the floor had been reconsidered—

—

and hadn't settled on an answer yet.

—

"...hey."

—

Still nothing.

—

## 6. First Use

Mai stepped forward.

—

This time the space let her.

—

That was noticeable.

Not visually.

But everyone felt it.

—

Something... yielded.

—

An insurgent moved into her line.

Fast. Aggressive. Weapon up.

—

He never reached her.

—

Not because she stopped him.

—  
Because he... wasn't where "forward" was anymore.

—  
One second: charging straight.

Next second: displaced sideways, colliding into another agent who definitely hadn't planned for that.

—  
They both went down.

Confused more than injured.

—  
Badger stared.

<blockquote>

"...nope. nope. I'm out. I'm mentally out."

</blockquote>

—  
Grouse didn't laugh.

Didn't comment.

—  
"...she didn't push him."

Beat.

"...she changed what direction meant."

## 7. Systems Try to Catch Up (They Don't)

Somewhere deeper in the facility—

—  
alarms finally escalated.

Proper ones this time.

Layered. Urgent. Real.

—

Too late.

—

Control Room feeds showed the corridor.

Showed Mai.

Showed... alignment.

—

“Energy spike?”

“Negative.”

“Containment breach?”

“Negative.”

“Then what are we—”

—

The feed stuttered.

—

The wall behind Mai straightened—

—

then tried to return.

—

It didn't.

—

No one finished that sentence.

—

## **8. The Slope Starts**

Mai moved again.

—

A cracked section of wall corrected.

Not repaired.

Corrected.

—

A weapon misfired.

Not jammed—

just rejected.

—

A falling body shifted mid-drop—

not to avoid damage—

but to satisfy a cleaner path.

—

Mai's breathing stayed steady.

Even.

Measured.

—

"This can be resolved."

A beat.

—

"It's inefficient like this."

—

Ace took another step closer.

Careful this time.

—

The distance held.

—

"...Mai."

—

No response.

—  
“I can remove unnecessary variables.”

—  
Shammy’s voice dropped.

Not warning now.

Strain.

“...you really shouldn’t.”

—  
She pushed again—

—  
nothing pushed back.

—  
Mai paused.

—  
Not because of the warning.

—  
Because she was calculating.

## 9. The Moment Before It Goes Too Far

The corridor felt... flexible.

—  
Not collapsing.

Not breaking.

—  
Just no longer committed to a single answer.

—  
Ace could feel it in her balance.

The way her weight didn't settle exactly where it should.

—

"...Mai."

Sharper now.

—

Mai turned.

Looked at her.

—

And something was different.

—

Not emotion.

—

Certainty.

—

"This is solvable."

—

A beat.

—

"And I can fix it."

—

Badger, somewhere behind:

<blockquote>

"...that sentence is illegal. I'm pretty sure that's illegal."

</blockquote>

—

No one laughed.

—

Because part of them—

—  
recognized the logic.

## 10. Soft Point of No Return

Somewhere behind all of this—

—  
the door didn't open.

—  
It didn't need to.

—  
Whatever had been waiting—

—  
was already present.

—  
The system had been correcting.

—  
Now it had a reference.

—  
Mai stood in the center of the corridor.

Still.

Perfectly aligned.

—  
The environment shifted—

subtly—

to match her.

—  
It didn't find her.

—  
It aligned with her.

—  
And everything else—

—  
became deviation.

## END OF ACT II

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