

# ACE 20 — Structural Override

## Act II — The Impact (Revised, Humanized)

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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 someone had pulled on them and then let go without telling the rest of reality.

—

Shammy stepped back.

Actually stepped back.

“...nope.”

—

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 just short.

—

Not because she hesitated.

—

Because the space in between didn't quite... exist right.

—

Her hand hovered.

Close.

Close enough that it *should* have made contact.

Didn't.

—

Ace frowned.

"...okay. that's new."

—

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...

...decided not to continue.

—

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 gravity remembered its job all at once.

—

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.

“...Mai.”

—

No response.

—  
Ace shifted her stance, testing her footing.

It felt... off.

Not unstable.

Just slightly wrong.

Like the floor had been *reconsidered*.

—  
“...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... gave way.

—  
An insurgent moved into her line.

Fast. Aggressive. Weapon up.

—  
He never reached her.

Not because she stopped him.

—

Because he... wasn't where he thought he was anymore.

—

One second: charging straight.

Next second: half a meter to the left, 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 moved where 'forward' was."

—

## **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... something happening.

—

But none of the data matched.

—

“Energy spike?”

“Negative.”

“Containment breach?”

“Negative.”

“Then what are we—”

—

No one finished that sentence.

—

## **8. The Slope Starts**

Mai moved again.

—

A cracked section of wall straightened slightly.

Not repaired.

Just... corrected.

—

A weapon misfired.

Not jammed—just... didn't feel like working.

—

A falling body shifted just enough to avoid hitting something sharp.

—

Mai's breathing stayed steady.

Even.

Measured.

—

"This can be resolved."

—

Ace took another step closer.

Careful this time.

—

"...Mai."

—

No response.

—

"I can remove unnecessary variables."

—

Shammy's voice dropped, tight now.

"...you really shouldn't."

—

Mai paused.

—

Not because of the warning.

—

Because she was thinking.

—

## 9. The Moment Before It Goes Too Far

The corridor felt... flexible.

—

Not collapsing.

Not breaking.

—

Just no longer fully committed to its own shape.

—

Ace could feel it in her balance.

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

—

"...Mai."

This time sharper.

—

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.

Not really.

—

Because part of them—

—

believed her.

—

## **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 here.

—

And it had found the one person in the room who could actually understand it.

—

Mai stood in the center of the corridor.

Still.

Perfectly aligned.

—

And everything else—

—

just slightly wrong.

—

## END OF ACT II (REVISED)

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