

ACE 20 — Structural Override

Act IV — Anchor Point

1. It Doesn't Explode

Nothing dramatic happens.

—

No surge.

No final escalation.

—

That's the problem.

—

Everything just... keeps going.

Slightly wrong.

Slightly easier for Mai.

Slightly harder for everyone else.

—

The corridor breathes wrong.

Angles drift a fraction off and don't quite return.

Distances stretch, settle, stretch again like they're not sure what they're supposed to be.

—

Badger looks around slowly.

<blockquote>

"...this is the part where it stabilizes, right?"

</blockquote>

—

No one answers.

2. Too Stable

—
Mai stands still.

Perfectly balanced.

Perfectly centered.

—
Everything else adjusts around her.

—
A loose panel on the wall slides into alignment.

A dropped weapon rotates half a turn and stops in a position that somehow looks more “correct.”

Even the bodies on the floor—

—
Badger notices that one.

—
<blockquote>

“...hey.”

</blockquote>

He points.

<blockquote>

“that guy wasn’t facing that way.”

</blockquote>

—
HeavenlyFather doesn’t look.

<blockquote>

“leave it.”

</blockquote>

Badger doesn't argue.

Which says enough.

—

3. Shammy Pushes Back (Properly This Time)

Shammy exhales slowly.

—

Then again.

—

The air shifts.

Not subtly anymore.

—

Temperature drops a degree.

Then rises.

Then dips again.

—

Tiny pressure pockets form and collapse.

Unpredictable.

Messy.

Human.

—

For the first time since this started—

—

the corridor feels... *alive* again.

—

Not stable.

But real.

—

Mai's eyes flick.

Just slightly.

—

"...inconsistent."

—

Shammy tilts her head.

A faint static crackle runs through the air.

—

"...yeah."

Beat.

—

"...that's the point."

—

4. Ace Doesn't Wait Anymore

Ace steps forward.

—

No testing.

No hesitation.

—

The space pushes back.

Harder this time.

—

She leans into it.

—

It's not force.

It's not resistance.

—

It's like trying to walk through a decision someone else already made.

—

Ace exhales.

Short.

—

"...not your call."

—

And pushes through anyway.

—

For a moment—

—

things don't line up.

—

Her foot lands slightly off.

Her balance shifts—

—

she adjusts.

Instantly.

—

Because that's what she does.

—

5. Close Enough to Matter

Now she's right there.

—

Close enough that the rest of the world doesn't really matter.

—

Mai looks at her.

—

There's still that certainty.

That clean, sharp logic.

—

But now—

—

there's interference.

—

Shammy's pressure.

The uneven air.

The slight instability creeping back in.

—

Tiny cracks.

—

Ace doesn't smile.

Doesn't soften.

—

"...stop."

—

Mai blinks.

—

"Why."

—

No edge.

No challenge.

—

Just a question.

—

6. The Argument That Actually Lands

Ace tilts her head slightly.

—

“...because it’s not broken.”

—

Mai looks past her.

At the corridor.

At the shifted walls.

At the missing people.

At the weapons that don’t behave.

—

“It is.”

—

Ace:

“...yeah.”

Beat.

—

“...so are we.”

—

That one hangs.

—

Not heavy.

Not dramatic.

—

Just... there.

—

7. The Slip

Mai studies her.

—

Really studies her.

—

And then—

—

the logic slips sideways.

Just a fraction.

—

“You are significantly below optimal scale.”

—

Ace exhales.

Not even surprised.

—

“...don’t.”

—

Mai:

“I can correct that.”

—

Badger, immediately:

<blockquote>

“NO—nope—hard pass—she’s perfect—leave her alone—”

</blockquote>

—

Ace doesn’t look away.

—

“I like my size.”

—

Mai considers it.

Actually runs the calculation.

—

“You would have increased reach.”

—

“I manage.”

—

“Higher survivability.”

—

“...still here.”

—

“Reduced dependency on environmental leverage.”

—

Ace smirks.

Just a little.

—

“...I like my leverage.”

—

Mai pauses.

—

“...inefficient.”

—

8. That’s the Crack

It’s small.

—

But it's real.

—

That exchange—

—

that *normal* conversation in the middle of all this—

—

does something.

—

The corridor flickers.

Not visually.

—

Conceptually.

—

For a split second—

—

things don't line up the way Mai expects them to.

—

9. Shammy Leans In

Shammy steps closer.

Right behind Ace now.

—

The air shifts harder.

Unpredictable.

Uneven.

Alive.

—

"...you don't want this clean."

—
Mai:

“Clean is optimal.”

—
Shammy:

“...clean is empty.”

—
That lands differently.

10. The Real Decision

Mai looks between them.

—
Ace.

Steady.

Unmoving.

Refusing to adapt.

—
Shammy.

Unstable.

Noisy.

Impossible to fully model.

—
Then the corridor.

—
Everything she could fix.

Everything she could remove.

Everything she could make *better*.

—

The answer is obvious.

—

Which is why it's hard.

—

"...this can be resolved."

—

Ace nods once.

—

"...I know."

—

Beat.

—

"...don't."

—

Silence.

—

Not the empty kind.

—

The kind where something has to give.

—

11. It Gives

Mai exhales.

—

For the first time—

—

it's not controlled.

—
Just... human.

—
The corridor shudders.

Not violently.

—
Like something letting go of tension it didn't realize it was holding.

—
The angles slip.

The distances misalign.

—
Then—

—
they settle.

—
Not perfect.

—
Just... enough.

12. Collapse (Soft Landing)

Mai sways.

—
Just slightly.

—
Ace catches her before she fully drops.

—
This time—

—

there is no resistance.

—

Contact works.

—

“...hey.”

—

Mai doesn't answer.

Not immediately.

—

Her eyes close.

Just for a second.

—

Then open again.

—

Back to normal.

Mostly.

—

“...that was inefficient.”

—

Ace huffs a quiet laugh.

—

“...yeah.”

Beat.

—

“...welcome back.”

—

Shammy exhales behind them.

The air settles.

Still uneven.

But real.

—

Badger finally moves again.

Slow.

Careful.

—

<blockquote>

“...okay.”

</blockquote>

Beat.

—

<blockquote>

“...we good?”

</blockquote>

—

No one answers that.

—

Because—

—

they don't actually know yet.

—

END OF ACT IV

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