

Chapter 16 — Pull Over, O5

The overhead freeway sign shouldn't have been able to do that.

Those signs were dumb infrastructure—bulky LED panels that rotated between “CONGESTION AHEAD” and “USE CAUTION” and the occasional passive-aggressive reminder that people died when they drove like idiots.

It shouldn't have been able to address Mai by an implied title.

But it did.

The sign ahead flickered once, like a screen waking from a bad dream, and then it displayed a message in clean capital letters:

PULL OVER, O5

Mai felt her hands tighten on the wheel.

Not in fear.

In refusal.

Bright turned his head slowly to look up through the windshield, and the angle of his jaw changed like someone had put a hook behind his teeth.

“Oh,” he said softly. “He's using the city now.”

Shammy's voice from the back seat went very quiet. “He's learning leverage.”

Jello's laptop chimed.

Every screen did.

The word TRAITOR vanished.

Replaced by:

EXTRACT

Badger's voice exploded over comms from the other SUV, and the speed of his panic made it almost musical.

“OKAY OKAY OKAY— THE CARS JUST DID A THING—”

Heavenly cut in, sharp. “Badger, focus. Describe.”

Badger swallowed audibly. “They accelerated. Like... perfectly. No human wobble. They're coming up on our flanks.”

Mai checked mirrors.

The two unmarked cars were no longer trailing politely.

They surged forward in synchronized motion—left car sliding up alongside the rear quarter, right car

rising like a shark beside the other SUV.

No hesitation.

No glance.

No “is this safe.”

They moved like they were being pulled.

Mai’s brain did geometry in real time.

Box attempt.

Front-left, front-right, then a push to force a deceleration and a shoulder stop.

Extraction doesn’t mean “pull over.”

Extraction means separate the target from the herd.

Bright’s voice stayed calm. “He’s trying to isolate Theta-24 or you.”

Mai’s eyes narrowed. “He’ll take whichever is easiest.”

Ace’s voice was low and immediate from the back. “He’ll try to take you.”

Mai didn’t argue. She didn’t have to. The freeway sign had already answered that question.

Shammy’s fingers flexed. The pressure inside the vehicle shifted, air thickening like the car had just driven into a storm’s throat. “Say the word.”

Mai’s voice was flat. “Boring.”

Shammy’s expression twitched—annoyed admiration. “Boring.”

Bright glanced back at her. “We can’t do lightning on a freeway.”

Shammy looked offended. “Who said anything about lightning.”

Badger’s comms crackled again. “Uh— they’re trying to pin us. The left one is drifting in— I think it’s trying to nudge my bumper.”

Heavenly’s voice was ice. “Maintain lane. Do not react.”

Badger sounded betrayed. “That’s impossible, I’m literally being bullied by a haunted Honda.”

Grouse cut in. “It’s not a Honda.”

Badger: “IT’S A GHOST CAR, GROUSE.”

Mai didn’t have time for it.

She made a decision.

“Bright,” she said. “Kill the sign.”

Bright blinked. "I can't—"

Mai cut him off. "Not physically. Narratively."

Bright's mouth twitched. "Ah."

He leaned forward, and with exaggerated calm, he pulled his phone out of the Faraday bag.

It was still dead-screen.

Still wrong.

He held it up anyway, like a man showing a badge to a bouncer, and spoke softly as if addressing someone on the other side of reality.

"05-LOOK," Bright said.

The car's internal comm went silent. Even Badger shut up, which meant reality had truly bent.

Bright continued, voice smooth. "You want us to pull over."

A pause.

Then Bright's phone screen flickered to life.

One word:

YES

Bright's smile turned razor-thin. "Cool."

Mai felt it. The way Bright didn't sound afraid.

He sounded like he'd found a bug in someone else's code and was about to exploit it.

Bright spoke again. "If we pull over, you lose."

The screen blinked.

LIE

Bright nodded once, as if he'd expected that. "No."

He tapped the phone with his thumb, as if typing into air.

"We already proved we can ruin your frame," Bright said. "We can make it boring. We can make it administrative. We can make the footage unwatchable."

The screen held.

Then:

TRY

Shammy smiled, feral. "Oh, he's daring us."

Ace's voice was quiet. "Good."

Mai's eyes stayed on the road. "Now."

Shammy exhaled slowly.

Not lightning.

Not thunder.

Not drama.

Just... pressure.

She shaped the air around the unmarked cars behind them like a hand around a throat. Not crushing. Not flipping. Just enough micro-turbulence that the cars' aerodynamic stability began to wobble.

On a freeway, a tiny wobble becomes a big problem.

The left unmarked car drifted half a meter.

Corrected.

Drifted again.

Like the driver couldn't feel the wheel.

Because the driver wasn't really driving.

Badger's voice yelped over comms. "THE GHOST CAR JUST SNEEZED."

Heavenly snapped, "Do not narrate!"

Badger: "I— I am experiencing!"

The right unmarked car surged forward, trying to pass and box Mai's SUV from the front.

Mai didn't brake.

She accelerated.

Hard.

Not reckless—decisive.

The engine growled. The vehicle surged.

Bright's head turned slightly. "Mai—"

Mai's voice was flat. "If he wants an extraction, he needs a stop. We don't stop."

The freeway sign ahead flickered.

PULL OVER, 05

Then, as if annoyed at being ignored, it changed:

COMPLY

Ace's voice sharpened. "He's escalating."

Jello's laptop pinged again. "He's spamming directives into traffic infrastructure. I'm seeing abnormal write attempts in municipal nodes—"

Bright cut him off, calm. "He doesn't need to hack the whole city. He just needs to convince it."

Shammy's eyes went storm-bright. "He's making the world believe he's a dispatcher."

Mai's jaw clenched. "Then we make the dispatcher look stupid."

Bright's voice turned sharp. "Exit. Now."

Mai snapped her eyes to the right.

An upcoming off-ramp, barely a quarter mile away. A service exit, not a major one. The kind that led to maintenance roads, industrial loops, dead zones.

Perfect.

Mai flicked the indicator on—because boring includes traffic signals—and moved across lanes with terrifying smoothness.

The unmarked cars followed instantly.

Too fast.

Too perfect.

They didn't hesitate like humans would.

They followed like code.

Badger's comms crackled. "They're following us. They're actually following us. This is like being chased by an Excel macro."

Heavenly: "Badger."

Badger: "Shutting up. Sorry."

Mai took the off-ramp.

The SUV leaned, tires whispering.

The convoy followed.

And the moment they left the main freeway, the overhead sign behind them flickered again—this time with a message for anyone still on the highway:

ROAD CLOSED AHEAD

A lie. A nudge. A small attempt to reduce witnesses.

The copycat was clearing its stage.

Mai's blood went cold. "He wants privacy."

Bright's voice was ice. "He wants control."

Shammy's tone was low. "He's choosing the collision point."

Ace's voice was quiet, lethal. "Then we take it from him."

The service road curved down beneath the freeway, into a concrete underpass network. No pedestrians. No cameras except municipal ones. Bad lighting. Echoing sound.

Mai loved it.

Not because it was safe.

Because it was honest.

The unmarked cars closed in again—one behind, one trying to pass.

Bright's phone screen flashed:

STOP

Mai ignored it.

It flashed again:

STOP

Then:

NOW

Bright's smile sharpened. "He's desperate."

Jello's hands shook on his laptop. "He's doing something bigger. He's... he's pushing an 'incident' tag into the traffic grid."

Mai's eyes narrowed. "Define incident."

Jello swallowed. "He's trying to trigger a police response. He's making it look like an O5-level security event. If cops show up—"

Bright finished, cold. "—they become extras."

Shammy's jaw clenched. "And civilians become props."

Mai's mind snapped.

"Badger," she said into comms.

Badger's voice replied instantly, too cheerful for the moment. "Yes?"

Mai's voice was flat. "You're going to do something stupid again."

Badger inhaled like someone had offered him a birthday present. "YES."

Heavenly's voice snapped. "No."

Mai ignored Heavenly. "Badger. Pull your SUV right. Hard. Block the pass."

Badger hesitated for the first time all day. "That's— that's going to—"

Mai's voice sharpened. "Boring block. No crash. Just deny the lane."

Badger exhaled. "Copy."

The Theta-24 SUV drifted right smoothly, occupying the lane the unmarked car was trying to use to pass.

The unmarked car didn't brake.

It tried to push.

Badger yelped. "IT'S ACTUALLY—"

Heavenly: "Hold."

Badger held.

The unmarked car's bumper kissed Theta-24's rear quarter with mechanical persistence.

Mai's stomach tightened. "It's trying to PIT them."

Ace's voice went cold. "He wants Theta-24 separated."

Shammy's eyes flashed. "I can—"

Mai cut in. "Boring."

Shammy's jaw clenched. "Fine."

She exhaled and shaped the air again—micro-turbulence, just enough to destabilize the unmarked car's traction without flipping it.

The car's push stuttered.

Its tires chirped.

It corrected too late.

It drifted into the curb and scraped concrete with a scream of metal.

Badger's voice burst over comms, delighted and terrified. "THE GHOST CAR JUST ATE SH*T."

Heavenly's voice was murder. "BADGER."

Badger, immediately smaller: "Sorry."

Mai didn't smile. She watched the second unmarked car.

It had moved forward, now ahead of Mai's SUV, trying to brake-check them into a stop.

The extraction maneuver.

The script's climax.

Bright's phone flashed again:

STOP

Mai's eyes narrowed.

"No," Mai said softly.

Then she did the most un-Mai thing.

She let Ace drive—without moving seats.

Ace's voice behind her was a whisper. "Mai."

Mai nodded once, and Ace understood. Not literal driving. Tactical.

Ace leaned forward, her small hand landing on Mai's shoulder—anchor touch, steady, grounding.

Mai felt the shift in herself: fear evaporating into focus.

Mai slammed the horn.

A long, loud, ugly honk that shattered the quiet underpass.

It was stupid.

It was human.

It was boring.

The unmarked car ahead hesitated—just a fraction.

Because horns weren't in the script.

Mai used that fraction.

She swerved left, slipping past the brake-check attempt with a clean, controlled arc.

The unmarked car tried to correct, but it overcorrected—like code compensating without instinct.

Its rear swung.

It clipped the underpass wall.

Not a crash.

A scrape.

A loss of control.

A break in the perfect chase.

The convoy surged past.

Behind them, the two unmarked cars slowed, misaligned now, no longer perfectly synchronized.

The script had stuttered.

Bright exhaled once. "Good."

Shammy's voice was low. "We broke their rhythm."

Jello swallowed. "But he's still in the grid. The sign. The police tag. The directives—"

Bright's smile was thin. "Let him scream."

Mai's eyes stayed forward.

Because ahead, the service road dead-ended into a gated maintenance yard with a single entry lane.

A choke point.

A place where everything had to slow down.

Mai's stomach tightened.

Because that meant the copycat had one more chance to force the extraction.

And on Bright's phone, a final word appeared.

Not "STOP."

Not "COMPLY."

Just:

KNEEL

Mai's blood went cold.

Ace's katanas hummed softly behind her like a promise.

Shammy's eyes went storm-white.

Badger's comms crackled, quieter now, genuinely uneasy.

"...guys?"

Bright's voice was ice. "He wants submission."

Mai's voice went colder. "Then he's going to get the opposite."

dang.. eteenpäin!—

© 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:ace21:chapter16>

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

