

ACE 31.2 — Interlude: Processing Cost

The clinic didn't advertise.

It didn't need to.

The kind of people who ended up here weren't looking for signage.

They were looking for solutions—quiet ones, deniable ones, the kind that didn't exist on any official grid.

The building itself looked abandoned from the outside.

Half-dead neon flickering two floors up.

A broken access panel hanging open like someone had stopped caring halfway through fixing it.

Inside—

it was clean.

Not sterile.

Maintained.

That was a different kind of statement.

The door opened before they touched it.

Not automatic.

Not reactive.

Someone inside had seen them—and made a decision.

"Come in."

The voice was calm. Low. Familiar.

Viktor Vektor didn't look up immediately.

He finished what he was doing first—hands steady, movement economical, every action completing before the next began.

No rush.

No hesitation.

Just—

correct.

Then he glanced up.

And paused.

Not surprised.

Not alarmed.

Assessing.

"...Yeah," he said quietly.

"...you're not standard."

V leaned against the wall, already comfortable in a place that wasn't meant to be.

"Told you."

Ace didn't move deeper into the room.

She stopped just past the threshold—not claiming the space, not rejecting it either.

Just—

present.

Mai stepped forward.

"Enhancement," she said.

Direct.

No framing. No justification.

Viktor's eyes settled on her.

Longer than necessary.

Not suspicion.

Curiosity.

"Define."

Mai didn't hesitate.

"Processing."

A beat.

"Latency reduction. Pattern recognition acceleration."

Viktor's eyebrow lifted slightly.

"...That's a new one."

He pushed himself off the table and stepped closer—not reaching, not touching, just reading.

"You're already running clean," he said.

A pause.

"Cleaner than most people I see."

Mai didn't react.

"That is insufficient."

Flat. Certain.

Viktor exhaled slowly through his nose.

"Yeah," he muttered.

"...this city does that."

His gaze shifted to Ace.

Stopped.

Held.

"...You've got nothing."

Not a question.

A statement.

Ace didn't react.

"Works," she said.

Viktor nodded once.

"For now."

Then his attention moved—

to Shammy.

And stayed there.

Longer.

The air in the room shifted subtly, pressure redistributing without visible cause.

Viktor didn't reach for anything. Didn't ask.

Just watched.

"...I'm not even going to ask," he said.

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

"That would be inefficient."

A flicker of something—almost a smile—touched Viktor's expression.

"Yeah," he said.

"...that tracks."

He turned back to Mai.

"You want processing," he said.

A short pause.

"I can do that."

No theatrics.

No sales pitch.

Just fact.

"But—"

There it was.

The real part.

"It'll change how you think."

Mai didn't blink.

"That is the objective."

Viktor shook his head once.

"No."

A beat.

"That's the risk."

Silence settled—not heavy, but precise.

He moved to the chair and tapped it lightly.

"Sit."

Mai did.

No hesitation.

Ace didn't move.

Her attention wasn't on the tools.

It was on Viktor.

On intent.

On whether this was control—or something else.

Viktor worked.

Efficient. Measured. Exact.

Every movement had a reason.

Every step completed before the next began.

Time passed—

but not much.

Then he stepped back.

“Done.”

Mai stood immediately.

No recalibration. No visible adjustment.

She looked at the room—

once.

And something shifted.

Not outside.

Inside.

Connections aligned faster.

Patterns locked in sooner.

Noise reduced.

Shammy noticed first.

“You’re faster,” she said.

Mai didn’t answer.

She didn’t need to.

She turned toward the door.

The system was simple. Local. Non-networked.

It still responded.

Her hand moved—

before the thought fully formed.

The door opened.

Not predicted.

Executed.

V blinked.

"...Okay."

A beat.

"...that's new."

Mai paused.

Not confused.

Processing.

"It reduces delay," she said.

"Significantly."

Viktor crossed his arms.

"Yeah," he said.

"...and it's going to make you trust it."

Mai didn't respond.

Not because she disagreed—

but because it didn't matter yet.

Ace stepped forward.

Looked at her.

Not impressed.

Not concerned.

Measuring.

"It works," she said.

Mai nodded.

"Yes."

A pause.

"It does."

Viktor's gaze returned to Ace.

Stayed there longer this time.

"...You ever think about it?"

No pressure.

Just—

offered.

Ace didn't answer immediately.

Her eyes flicked once to Mai—tracking the difference, the speed, the absence of friction.

Then back to Viktor.

"What."

Viktor shrugged.

"Reflex boost."

A beat.

"Neural acceleration."

Another.

"You'd be scary."

He paused.

Then, quieter:

"...Problem is, I'm not sure you should be."

Silence.

That landed.

Shammy watched Ace.

The air shifted—subtle, attentive.

"You're thinking about it."

Ace didn't respond.

Which—

was the answer.

V exhaled slowly.

"...Yeah," they muttered.

“...this city gets to everyone.”

Ace turned.

Not dismissing it.

Not accepting it.

Holding it.

“We move.”

Default.

Control.

Mai nodded.

Already adjusting.

Shammy followed, the air settling back into balance as she moved.

Viktor didn't stop them.

Didn't offer anything else.

Until—

they reached the door.

“Don't overdo it.”

Not directed.

Not specific.

Just—

true.

Because in Night City—

enhancement wasn't the danger.

Dependence was.

The door closed behind them.

Mai processed faster.

Ace—

thought a fraction longer than before.

And Shammy—

felt the shift

before either of them

said a word.

—

© 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

Check out our SubscribeStar page at <https://subscribestar.adult/konrad-k>

From:

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

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace31.2:start>

Last update: **27/04/2026 07:46**

