

ACE 37 — Predictable Damage (Act 8: System Strain)

They didn't talk on the way out.

Not because there was nothing to say.

Because everything they said would've lined up too cleanly.

The rain outside felt wrong again.

Not delayed.

Not misaligned.

Overcorrected.

Ace stopped just outside the structure.

"...you feel that?"

Mai nodded immediately.

"Yes."

A beat.

"Everything's snapping back too hard."

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air resisted her.

For the first time.

"...it's pushing us out," she said.

Ace frowned.

“Out of what?”

Shammy didn't answer right away.

“...out of the space where this works.”

That landed.

Mai's eyes narrowed.

“...system rejection.”

Ace huffed softly.

“Yeah, well, it's a bit late for that.”

A comm crackled.

Clear this time.

Too clear.

“Containment teams rerouting.”

“Multiple sites showing irregular behavior.”

“Pattern escalation confirmed.”

Ace looked at Mai.

“...multiple?”

Mai nodded slowly.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“He didn’t just scale himself.”

Shammy finished it.

“...he stressed the system.”

Ace exhaled.

“...so now everything’s breaking.”

“No,” Mai said.

A beat.

“Now everything’s trying to not break.”

That was worse.

□ THE CITY

They didn’t need to go far.

Two blocks down—

Something was wrong.

Not violently.

Not obviously.

Subtle.

A traffic light flickered.

Then corrected.

Too precisely.

A car stopped.

Not because it had to.

Because it *decided* to.

A pedestrian hesitated at a crossing—

Then moved anyway.

Wrong timing.

No collision.

But close enough that everyone noticed.

And adjusted.

Ace watched it all.

“...it’s spreading.”

Mai shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“It’s tightening.”

THE PROBLEM

Shammy stepped into the street.

The air didn’t follow her.

Didn’t flow.

It held.

“...it’s forcing alignment,” she said quietly.

Ace blinked.

“...that’s the opposite of what he was doing.”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“He created instability.”

Shammy continued:

“...and now the system is overcorrecting.”

Ace grimaced.

“...so either way—”

“—we lose flexibility,” Mai finished.

□ CONTACT

A voice behind them.

“Exactly.”

They didn't turn immediately.

Didn't need to.

He was there.

Again.

Street level this time.

No structure.

No controlled space.

Just—

City.

“You pushed too far,” he said calmly.

Ace turned.

Slow.

“...funny,” she said.

“I was about to say the same thing.”

He shook his head slightly.

“No.”

A pause.

“I pushed just far enough.”

Mai stepped forward.

“You didn’t account for system strain.”

He looked at her.

“I did.”

That stopped her.

Shammy felt it next.

“...you wanted this.”

A small pause.

“Yes.”

THE REVEAL

He gestured slightly.

Not at them.

At the street.

“The system corrects,” he said.

“Always.”

A beat.

“But it overcorrects under stress.”

Ace’s jaw tightened.

“...you’re forcing it to choose.”

“Yes.”

Mai’s voice dropped.

“Between control and adaptability.”

He nodded.

“And it can’t sustain both.”

Silence.

□ CONSEQUENCE

A car accelerated.

Too fast.

Then stopped.

Too hard.

Behind it—

Another didn’t.

Impact.

Not catastrophic.

But wrong.

The timing didn’t match.

People shouted.

Moved.

Adjusted.

Everything started to—

Tighten.

Shammy stepped forward.

The air resisted again.

“...it’s locking down,” she said.

Ace looked between him and the street.

“...you’re not optimizing anymore.”

A beat.

“You’re forcing failure.”

He didn’t deny it.

“No,” he said.

A pause.

“I’m forcing choice.”

□ TRIAD RESPONSE

Mai’s eyes sharpened.

“...then we give it neither.”

Ace glanced at her.

“...you got something?”

Mai nodded once.

“Stop interacting.”

Ace blinked.

“...what?”

Shammy understood first.

“...we step out of the system.”

Ace stared at both of them.

“...that’s not how—”

“No,” Mai said.

A beat.

“That’s exactly how this works.”

□ **THE MOVE**

They stopped.

Completely.

No adjustment.

No reaction.

No correction.

The world kept moving.

Cars.

People.

Signals.

But around them—

A gap formed.

Not visible.

Not physical.

Just—

Unaccounted.

EFFECT

The overcorrection faltered.

Timing slipped.

Pressure eased.

Not fully.

But enough.

Shammy exhaled.

The air followed again.

“...it doesn’t know what to do with nothing,” she said.

Mai nodded.

“Exactly.”

Ace looked at him.

“...your move.”

□ HIS REACTION

For the first time—

He hesitated.

Not long.

But real.

“...interesting,” he said.

A pause.

“You removed yourselves from the equation.”

Mai met his gaze.

“We stopped solving your problem.”

Silence.

Then—

A faint shift.

The tension dropped.

Not gone.

Reduced.

□ **BEAT**

He stepped back.

Not disengaging.

Reconsidering.

“This isn’t over,” he said.

Ace smirked slightly.

“...yeah,” she said.

“Now it’s fun.”

Rain fell.

This time—

Almost right.

—

© 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:ace37:chapter8>

Last update: **20/04/2026 16:15**

