

HORIZON PROTOCOL

Chapter 1 — Arrival

The Mexican plateau breathed heat even at dusk.

Dust rolled slowly across the asphalt outside the Horizon Festival staging area, turning the setting sun into a red smear against the mountains. In the distance, speakers tested bass lines that shook the ground like distant thunder. Helicopters drifted lazily overhead, camera rigs hanging beneath them like mechanical vultures waiting for the show to start.

To the outside world it looked like a celebration.

To the Foundation, it looked like a statistical impossibility.

Cars crashed here.

They flew.

They tumbled down mountainsides, slammed into guardrails, shattered through billboards and concrete barriers.

And somehow no one died.

The anomaly had persisted for years.

No consistent trigger.

No identifiable energy source.

No reliable containment method.

Only one constant.

Horizon happened.

Every year.

The transport truck's rear ramp lowered with a hydraulic hiss.

Inside, two vehicles waited in the dim light.

The **Nissan Nismo 270R** sat low and predatory, paint dark enough to swallow reflections. Its lines were compact, purposeful — the shape of a machine built for streets that did not forgive mistakes.

Next to it rested the **Aston Martin DB11**, longer, heavier, elegant in the way large predators were elegant.

Two completely different philosophies of speed.

Both already familiar.

Ace stood beside the ramp, arms folded, violet eyes tracking the dust swirling across the lot. The wind tugged lightly at her dark hair.

She looked small against the truck's massive silhouette.

Small, and absolutely unconcerned.

Mai stepped down from the opposite side of the vehicle carrier, tablet in hand, silver hair pulled back loosely. The evening light flashed briefly in her pale eyes as she glanced at the diagnostic feed scrolling across the screen.

Behind her, Shammy leaned one shoulder against the DB11's door, watching the growing crowd of racers gathering across the paddock.

Engines revved in the distance.

Music rose.

A cheer rolled across the festival grounds like a wave.

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

"...atmosphere is unusual," she said softly.

Mai didn't look up.

"Crowds tend to create that effect."

"That isn't what I meant."

Mai paused.

Then she glanced toward the mountains.

Wind currents had shifted.

Pressure gradients were... strange.

Not dangerous.

Just wrong.

She filed the observation away.

Footsteps approached across the gravel.

Dr. Gears arrived without hurry, hands clasped behind his back, expression unchanged as always. Dust swirled around his shoes and he seemed completely unaware of it.

Or uninterested.

"Your equipment appears to have survived transit," he said.

Ace's gaze flicked toward the truck.

"Would've been disappointing if it hadn't."

Gears did not react to the tone.

“The vehicles remain Foundation property.”

“Yeah,” Ace said.

A beat passed.

“Bright already said that.”

Gears exhaled very slightly.

“Dr. Bright says many things.”

Mai glanced up from the tablet.

“Are the sensor packages still active?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

Gears nodded once.

“Dr. Bright insisted they remain exactly as delivered.”

Another small pause.

“I remain unconvinced of their necessity.”

Shammy smiled faintly.

“That’s comforting.”

Across the staging area, a line of racers began forming near the starting gantry.

Engines roared.

Someone launched fireworks prematurely.

A voice boomed over the speakers in Spanish and English, welcoming competitors to the newest Horizon Festival championship.

The noise rolled across the valley.

Ace stepped forward.

The Nismo’s door opened with a sharp metallic click.

She dropped into the driver’s seat and pulled the harness over her shoulders in one smooth motion.

The car swallowed her small frame easily.

The engine came alive with a tight mechanical snarl.

Not loud.

Not flashy.

Just dangerous.

Mai slid into the DB11 moments later, Shammy settling into the passenger seat beside her.

The Aston Martin's V12 woke with a deeper sound — restrained power humming beneath the hood.

Mai rested both hands lightly on the wheel.

Shammy closed her eyes for a moment.

Listening.

Wind.

Pressure.

Movement.

"...this place is strange," she murmured.

Mai allowed herself a faint smile.

"Everything interesting is."

Dr. Gears stepped back as the two cars rolled down the transport ramp.

Festival lights flickered on across the valley.

Twelve racers would start tonight.

Only ten events would decide the championship.

And somewhere inside the chaos of Horizon Festival, something was bending probability hard enough to interest the SCP Foundation.

The Nismo pulled ahead first, slipping through the crowd like a knife through cloth.

The DB11 followed a few seconds later, smoother, heavier, perfectly controlled.

Two different machines.

Two different drivers.

One anomaly waiting to be understood.

From the sidelines, Gears watched the cars disappear into the festival traffic.

After a moment he spoke quietly into the small comm device in his hand.

“Field team has arrived.”

A voice answered through static.

Bright sounded amused.

“Well?”

Gears looked toward the mountains.

Engines howled in the distance.

“...we will observe.”

The festival lights burned brighter as night finally fell.

And somewhere beyond the starting line, the first race was already waiting.

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