

CHAPTER 8 — First Contact

The distance between them didn't change.

Not immediately.

That mattered.

In most places—

distance meant intent.

Approach meant escalation.

Stillness meant calculation.

Here—

it meant observation.

The figure didn't reach for a weapon.

Didn't shift stance.

Didn't even adjust their footing.

That alone told Ace enough.

Not harmless.

Not careless.

Confident.

Mai stepped forward.

Half a step.

Not closing distance—

testing response.

Nothing changed.

Good.

“You recognized us,” she said.

The figure's gaze moved between them—

not lingering—

not prioritizing—

just—

mapping.

“Not exactly,” they said.

A beat.

“More like... I've seen the pattern.”

Pattern.

That word landed.

Mai's attention sharpened.

“Where.”

The figure shrugged slightly.

“Here and there.”

A small pause.

“Net fragments. Fixer chatter. Stuff that doesn’t line up clean.”

Ace didn’t care about the source.

Only the result.

“And that’s enough.”

The figure’s eyes flicked back to her.

“Yeah.”

A faint smirk.

“Usually it isn’t.”

That was honest.

Shammy stepped slightly to the side.

Not distancing.

Aligning.

The air shifted around the figure—

subtle—

but real.

“You’re stable,” she said.

The figure blinked once.

“...Thanks?”

Mai didn’t explain.

Didn't need to.

"Local structure holds," she said.

The figure exhaled quietly.

"Good to know."

A beat.

"Because if it didn't, we'd all have bigger problems."

Ace tilted her head slightly.

"We already do."

The figure studied her for a moment.

Then nodded once.

“Fair.”

A short silence settled.

Not awkward.

Measured.

The city moved around them—

never stopping—

never waiting.

The figure broke it.

“You got names?”

Mai answered first.

“Mai.”

Ace didn't hesitate.

"Ace."

Shammy watched the air for a second longer—

then:

"Shammy."

The figure nodded.

"V."

That was enough.

No more needed.

Ace didn't ask anything else.

Instead—

“Resources,” she said.

Direct.

V’s expression shifted.

Not surprised.

Just—

aligned.

“Yeah,” V said.

“Figured we’d get there.”

Mai stepped in.

“We need baseline.”

V nodded slowly.

“Then you need three things,” they said.

“Money. A place to crash. And people who don’t try to kill you the second you step into the wrong block.”

Ace’s expression didn’t change.

“That narrows it.”

V almost laughed.

“Welcome to Night City.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

The air around V held steady.

Consistent.

No pressure spikes.

No structural anomalies.

That mattered.

“You’re not reacting,” she said.

V raised an eyebrow.

“To what.”

“To us.”

A pause.

Short.

Then:

“...I am.”

Mai watched closely.

“How.”

V shrugged again.

“I’m not running.”

That was an answer.

Ace accepted it.

“Good,” she said.

V glanced between them once more.

“Look,” they said, tone shifting slightly—

not softer—

just clearer.

“You three showed up out of nowhere, you don’t match anything local, and you move like you already know how bad things can get.”

A beat.

“That usually means one of two things.”

Ace didn’t blink.

“Say it.”

V held her gaze.

“You’re either about to make this place worse...”

A pause.

“...or you’re the kind of problem people pay to point at something else.”

That landed.

Mai processed it instantly.

“Second option,” she said.

Ace didn’t argue.

Shammy didn’t need to.

V nodded.

“Yeah.”

A small exhale.

“Figured.”

Another silence.

Shorter this time.

Then:

“I’ve got a place you can use. Temporary.”

Ace didn’t thank them.

“Cost.”

V smirked slightly.

“Nothing upfront.”

A beat.

“But you don’t stay in Night City for free.”

Mai nodded once.

“Understood.”

V turned.

“Then come on.”

No dramatic gesture.

No hesitation.

Just movement.

Ace followed immediately.

Mai a step behind.

Shammy last.

The air shifted again—

not wrong—

just—

full.

As they moved deeper into the city—

the noise increased.

The density.

The pressure.

But underneath it—

something else remained.

A pattern.

Not visible.

Not explained.

But present.

And V had seen enough of it—

to know one thing for certain.

This wasn't the first time something like them had touched this city.

Just the first time

it had stayed

long enough

to matter.

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From:

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

Permanent link:

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Last update: **05/04/2026 14:23**

