

# ACE 37 — Predictable Damage (Final Act: Controlled Outcome)

They didn't speak for a while.

Not because there was nothing left to say.

Because anything clean would've felt like a mistake.

---

Ace rolled her wrist slowly.

Tested the memory of the hit.

"...he felt that," she muttered.

---

Mai nodded.

"Yes."

A beat.

"He adjusted immediately after."

---

Shammy didn't move.

The air had settled again.

Not perfect.

But no longer fighting them.

---

"...he's pulling back," she said quietly.

---

Ace glanced at her.

"...retreat?"

---

"No."

---

A pause.

---

“Reframing.”

---

That didn’t sound better.

---

## □ THE CALL

Rogue didn’t ping.

She just appeared on comms.

---

“You three still breathing?”

---

Ace smirked faintly.

“Yeah.”

A beat.

“For now.”

---

“Good,” Rogue said. “Because whatever you kicked, it’s moving.”

---

Mai stepped in.

“Multiple sites?”

---

“Yeah,” Rogue replied. “Small stuff. Misfires. Timing glitches. Nothing loud.”

A pause.

---

“Yet.”

---

Ace exhaled slowly.

“...he’s testing outside controlled space.”

---

“Not just testing,” Mai said.

---

Shammy finished it.

“...stabilizing.”

---

Silence.

---

Rogue didn’t like that.

“Explain.”

---

Mai’s voice dropped.

“He’s not trying to break the system anymore.”

A beat.

---

“He’s trying to find where it holds.”

---

## **THE DECISION**

Ace straightened.

---

“...then we don’t chase him,” she said.

---

Rogue blinked on the other end.

“That’s a new one.”

---

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

---

A pause.

---

“We limit exposure.”

---

Shammy stepped forward slightly.

The air followed again.

---

“...we don’t give him clean data,” she said.

---

Ace glanced between them.

---

“...we starve the model.”

---

Silence.

---

Then—

Rogue let out a short breath.

“...that might actually work.”

---

“Temporarily,” Mai said.

---

“Yeah,” Rogue replied. “Nothing here stays temporary.”

---

## □ THE LAST MOVE

A shadow shifted across the far end of the street.

---

Not dramatic.

Not obvious.

---

Just—

There.

---

Ace saw it first.

Didn't move.

---

“...he's watching,” she said quietly.

---

Mai didn't turn.

---

“He needs to confirm adaptation,” she said.

---

Shammy's gaze drifted slightly.

---

“...and whether we revert,” she added.

---

Ace smirked faintly.

---

“...not happening.”

---

## **FINAL EXCHANGE**

The voice came one last time.

---

Closer than before.

---

“You’ve improved.”

---

Ace didn’t react.

---

“...you’ve slowed down,” she replied.

---

A pause.

---

“That’s necessary,” he said.

---

Mai’s voice cut in.

---

“No,” she said.

---

A beat.

---

“That’s cost.”

---

Silence.

---

For the first time—

He didn’t answer immediately.

---

## □ THE TRUTH

Shammy stepped forward.

Just slightly.

---

The air held steady.

---

“...you can’t scale both,” she said quietly.

---

A longer pause.

---

Then—

---

“...no,” he said.

---

Flat.

---

Certain.

---

“But I can choose.”

---

## □ **THE END STATE**

Ace’s grip tightened slightly.

---

“...yeah,” she said.

---

“So can we.”

---

No one moved.

---

No one pushed.

---

No one finished it.

---

And that—

Was the point.

---

## □ **DISENGAGE**

He stepped back.

---

Not defeated.

Not escaping.

Choosing distance.

---

Rebalancing.

---

The space around him—

Didn't bend.

Didn't align.

---

He let it go.

---

And vanished into the city.

---

Not gone.

---

Just—

No longer here.

---

## □ **AFTERMATH**

Rain fell.

---

Normal.

---

Finally.

---

Ace exhaled.

---

“...that’s it?”

---

Mai shook her head.

---

“No.”

A beat.

---

“That’s the beginning.”

---

Shammy looked out into the street.

---

“...he won’t stop,” she said.

---

Ace smirked faintly.

---

“...good.”

---

She adjusted her stance.

---

Relaxed.

Ready.

---

“...neither will we.”

---

# ▣ LAST LINE

Night City didn't get quieter.

It just got—

Harder to predict.

—

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