

ACE 37 — Predictable Damage (Act 7: Breaking Inputs)

They didn't move for a moment.

Not because they didn't know what to do.

Because this time—

They had to choose it *wrong* on purpose.

Ace cracked her neck once.

"...okay," she said. "Say it again."

Mai didn't look at her.

"Stop chasing outcomes."

A beat.

"Break inputs."

Ace grimaced faintly.

"...still sounds like you."

Mai exhaled slowly.

"It isn't."

That got her attention.

"If I model this," Mai continued, "we lose."

Silence.

Shammy stepped forward.

The air didn't follow.

Didn't settle.

Didn't align.

"...he's using us as reference," she said quietly.

Ace nodded once.

"Yeah."

A beat.

"Then we stop being readable."

Mai finally looked up.

Not confident.

Not precise.

"Not just unreadable," she said.

A pause.

"Contradictory."

Ace's expression shifted.

Slightly.

"...that's worse," she muttered.

"Yes."

Shammy moved again.

Not forward.

Not back.

Across.

The air dragged slightly behind her.

Delayed.

“...we desync,” she said.

Ace smiled faintly.

“...now that I understand.”

Mai didn't smile.

She was already doing it.

□ THE SHIFT

They didn't coordinate.

They couldn't.

Ace moved first.

Fast.

Direct.

Then stopped halfway.

Mai started to follow—

Then reversed direction entirely.

Shammy pulled the air tight—

Then let it collapse unevenly.

Nothing lined up.

Nothing matched.

The space resisted.

For the first time—

It didn't know what to do.

THE RESPONSE

The pressure came back.

Not like before.

Not clean.

Jagged.

Ace felt it immediately.

“...there you are.”

The corridor twisted—
But not consistently.

Two paths tried to exist—
Then neither committed.

Mai’s voice cut through.
“He can’t resolve this!”

Shammy shook her head.
“...not cleanly.”

That was enough.

□ THE COLLAPSE

Everything started to misfire.

Doors opened—
Then didn’t.

Angles aligned—
Then slipped.

Timing broke—

Then overcorrected.

The system wasn't stable anymore.

It was—

Conflicted.

□ HIS REACTION

The voice came back.

Not calm this time.

Measured.

But tighter.

"...inefficient," he said.

Ace laughed once.

Short.

Sharp.

"Yeah," she said.

"Welcome to our side."

A pause.

Then—

Movement.

He appeared again.

Closer this time.

Not fully aligned.

Edges wrong.

Timing off.

For the first time—

He wasn't clean.

Mai saw it instantly.

"...he's compensating."

Shammy felt it.

"...he's being pulled."

Ace didn't wait.

She moved.

Wrong.

Deliberately wrong.

He adjusted—

Too late.

For a fraction of a second—

They intersected.

Real.

Ace struck.

Not perfect.

Not optimal.

But *real*.

The impact landed.

He staggered.

Just enough.

BREAK POINT

Silence snapped in.

Hard.

Everything froze—

Not in time.

In decision.

The system couldn't resolve it.

Two outcomes.

Both valid.

Neither chosen.

Shammy stepped forward.

The air forced itself through the gap.

Choosing—

For the space.

Everything collapsed—

Into one line.

□ **RESULT**

He stood there.

Actually there.

Not perfect.

Not untouchable.

Real.

For the first time.

Ace didn't hesitate.

She raised her blade—

He smiled.

Just slightly.

"...good," he said.

And stepped back.

Out of alignment.

Gone again.

□ **AFTERMATH**

The space snapped back.

Hard.

Clean.

Too clean.

Ace exhaled.

“...we hit him.”

Mai shook her head slowly.

“No.”

A beat.

“We forced him to adapt.”

Shammy looked at where he had been.

“...and now he knows how we break it.”

Silence.

Heavy.

Ace rolled her shoulder.

“...yeah,” she said.

“Next time—”

Mai finished it.

“—he won’t let us.”

Shammy didn’t look away.

“...unless we change again.”

A beat.

Ace smiled.

Not wide.

Not confident.

But real.

“...good,” she said.

“Because I’m just getting started.”

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