

# ACE 37 — Predictable Damage (Act 9: Feeding the Model)

They didn't go back to the Afterlife.

Didn't regroup.

Didn't "plan" in the way Rogue would've expected.

---

Because planning—

Was exactly what he needed.

---

Ace leaned against the side of a dim service corridor, arms loose, posture almost lazy.

Almost.

"...this feels wrong," she muttered.

Mai didn't look at her.

"Good."

---

Shammy stood a few meters ahead, not centered, not anchoring anything.

Just—

Present.

---

"He's listening," she said quietly.

---

Ace smirked faintly.

"...yeah," she said. "That's the point."

---

# □ THE SETUP

The location didn't matter.

That was the trick.

---

Same type of structure.

Same kind of corridors.

Same kind of choices.

---

Familiar.

Predictable.

---

They moved in formation.

Clean.

Tight.

---

Exactly the way they had before.

---

Mai led this time.

Not because she wanted to.

Because he would expect it.

---

Ace followed half a step behind.

Controlled.

Disciplined.

---

Shammy—

Held the center.

Perfectly balanced.

---

Everything lined up.

---

Too well.

---

## **THE SIGNAL**

It didn't take long.

---

A shift.

Not in the air.

Not in the light.

---

In the *timing*.

---

Mai felt it first.

"...he's here."

---

Ace didn't slow.

"...good."

---

A voice answered.

---

"You've corrected your structure."

---

Ahead.

Not hidden.

Not distant.

---

He stepped into view.

---

No hesitation this time.

No observation pause.

---

He had already started calculating.

---

## □ HIS READ

His eyes moved once across them.

---

Ace.

Mai.

Shammy.

---

Patterns.

Confirmed.

---

“You’re aligning again,” he said.

---

Mai didn’t respond.

---

She stepped forward.

Exactly as expected.

---

Ace shifted right.

Correct angle.

Correct speed.

---

Shammy held the center.

Perfect pressure.

---

Everything—

Correct.

---

## □ **THE BAIT**

He moved.

---

Clean.

Precise.

---

Intercepting.

---

Building the outcome.

---

Exactly the way he had before.

---

## **THE COMMIT**

He chose it.

---

That was the moment.

---

The point of no return.

---

Mai saw it.

---

“...now.”

---

## **THE BREAK**

Everything changed.

---

Ace didn't follow through.

---

*She overcommitted.*

---

Too far.

Too fast.

---

Wrong.

Mai didn't adjust.

---

She held the model.

---

Even though it was breaking.

---

Shammy—

Pulled the air *off-center*.

---

Not enough to collapse it.

---

Just enough to misalign.

---

## **RESULT**

For the first time—

His calculation failed.

---

Not completely.

---

But enough.

---

His movement—

Landed half a step wrong.

---

His position—

Offset.

---

His timing—

Late.

---

## □ CONTACT

Ace was already there.

---

Not optimal.

Not clean.

---

But real.

---

Her strike hit.

---

Not a graze.

---

A *hit*.

---

He staggered.

---

Actually staggered.

---

## **SILENCE**

Everything paused.

---

Not frozen.

---

Recalculating.

---

## **HIS REACTION**

He looked at Ace.

---

Not annoyed.

Not angry.

---

Focused.

---

"...you held the error," he said.

---

Mai didn't answer.

---

Shammy stepped forward.

The air tightened.

---

He felt it.

---

For the first time—

He was inside their field.

---

## □ **SECOND STRIKE**

Ace moved again.

---

Faster.

Closer.

---

He adjusted—

But not perfectly.

---

Mai shifted—

Breaking the follow-up.

---

Shammy forced the space—

To stay *imperfect*.

---

Everything held.

---

Just long enough.

---

## □ THE RESULT

They had him.

---

Not defeated.

---

But—

Contained.

---

A fraction.

---

A moment.

---

Real.

---

## ⚠ THE LIMIT

Then—

It slipped.

---

Not violently.

---

Not dramatically.

---

He stepped back.

Out.

---

Clean again.

---

But—

Different.

---

## □ HIS REALIZATION

He didn't speak immediately.

---

He was recalculating.

---

Actually recalculating.

---

"...you introduced noise," he said finally.

---

A pause.

---

"Deliberately."

---

Mai met his gaze.

---

"Yes."

Another pause.

---

Then—

Something new.

---

A faint shift in his expression.

---

Not emotion.

---

Recognition.

---

“...good,” he said.

---

**EXIT**

He didn't vanish.

---

Didn't disappear.

---

He walked.

---

Backward.

---

Controlled.

---

Out of the space where they could hold him.

---

“...this changes things,” he said.

---

Ace didn't lower her stance.

---

“...yeah,” she replied.

---

“Now it's fair.”

---

He shook his head once.

---

“No.”

---

A beat.

---

“Now it's interesting.”

---

And then—

He was gone.

---

## □ **AFTERMATH**

Silence.

Real this time.

---

Ace exhaled.

---

“...we had him.”

---

Mai shook her head slowly.

---

“No.”

---

A pause.

---

“He let it happen long enough to understand it.”

---

Shammy looked at the space he left behind.

---

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

---

Ace smirked.

---

“...good,” she said.

---

“Because now we know he can bleed.”

---

Silence settled.

---

Heavy.

---

But different.

---

For the first time—

Not one-sided.

---

## ☐ STATE CHANGE

- ✓ He is no longer untouchable
  - ✓ Triad can force errors
  - ✓ Model is vulnerable
- 

☐ But:

- ✓ He adapts
  - ✓ He learns
  - ✓ He scales
- 

The game just changed.

---

And now—

Both sides knew it.

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