

Black File: Night City Interlude — “Return Patterns”

Night City didn't forget faces.

It remembered patterns.

The triad had been back in rotation for a few days now. Jobs trickling in. Small ones. Test runs. Nothing that pushed too hard, but enough to keep the edges sharp. Enough to remind the city they were still there.

Tonight wasn't a job.

Not officially.

They didn't say it out loud this time. Didn't need to.

Ace was already pulling her jacket on before Mai even looked up from the window. Shammy stood near the door, head tilted slightly, like she was listening to something just beyond the walls.

“Same rules?” Mai asked, voice calm.

Ace shrugged. “No rules.”

Shammy smiled faintly. “Same return.”

That was enough.

They split.

Ace — Watson / Familiar Damage

Watson hit her the same way it always did.

Noise. Motion. Pressure.

Ace didn't slow down. She never did. The streets parted around her in that subtle way they had started to—people not quite realizing why they moved, only that they should.

She didn't go looking.

Still found it.

Same block. Same clinic.

Maelstrom this time didn't even get the first word out.

She was already moving when one of them recognized her.

Bad call.

The fight was shorter than last time. Cleaner. No wasted motion. No hesitation. When it was over, the street went quiet in that unnatural way it sometimes did after sudden violence.

And then—

Laughter.

Low. Familiar.

“You again.”

Reyes leaned against the clinic wall, lip already split, like she’d planned on bleeding tonight regardless.

Ace didn’t smile.

Didn’t need to.

“Bad habits,” Ace said.

Reyes pushed off the wall, stepped in close. No hesitation. No buildup. Just contact—hand at the back of Ace’s neck, pulling her in.

Same energy as last time.

Different night.

They didn’t rush upstairs immediately. This time there was a pause. A fraction of a second where Ace didn’t just follow the momentum—

She chose it.

That was new.

Reyes noticed.

Didn’t comment.

Inside, the room was the same. Smell of oil and heat. Half-broken lighting. Nothing romantic about it.

Didn’t matter.

They moved like they remembered each other.

Less proving. More knowing.

Reyes was still rough, still direct, but there was precision now—adjustments, reactions, reading the way Ace moved instead of trying to overpower it.

Ace stayed on top longer this time.

Not dominance.

Control.

Different thing.

After, they didn't collapse immediately. Just sat there for a moment, close but not clinging.

Reyes lit a cigarette, passed it over.

"You always come back?" she asked.

Ace exhaled slowly.

"I don't wander."

Reyes snorted. "Could've fooled me."

Ace didn't answer.

She was already pulling her jacket back on.

Mai — Japantown / Controlled Variables

Dark Matter again.

Of course.

Mai didn't repeat patterns by accident.

Kiro spotted her before she even reached the bar.

"Thought that was you."

"Statistically likely," Mai replied, sliding onto the stool.

Kiro laughed. Same sharp edge. Same quick read.

"You always talk like that?"

"Only when it's accurate."

They didn't waste time pretending this was new.

That was the difference.

No testing phase. No measuring distance.

They already knew the variables.

On the dance floor, it was tighter this time. Less exploration. More alignment. Movements syncing faster, cleaner, like two systems that had already calibrated once.

Kiro leaned in, voice low.

"You always this... predictable?"

Mai's lips curved slightly.

"No. Just consistent."

That answer did more than any touch could have.

The booth was the same. Red light. Mirrored surfaces. Closed space.

Contained.

Mai preferred it that way.

This time she didn't let Kiro take the lead first.

She stepped in, adjusted the angle, set the pace.

Not aggressive.

Deliberate.

Kiro followed without resistance.

Because it worked.

Everything about it was cleaner than last time. Not less intense—just... refined. Movements that anticipated instead of reacted. Timing that didn't need correction.

Kiro noticed that too.

"Yeah," she breathed at one point, half-laughing. "You definitely practiced."

Mai didn't respond.

Didn't need to.

After, they stayed in the booth a little longer than necessary. Not talking. Just... existing in the aftermath.

Kiro traced a faint mark along Mai's arm.

"You ever do random?"

Mai shook her head once.

"Nothing I do is random."

Kiro grinned. "Good. Would've been disappointed if I was."

Mai stood, already composed again.

"You weren't."

She left the shard again.

Different encryption this time.

Same intent.

Shammy — Pacifica / Returning Weather

Pacifica didn't change.

It shifted.

Shammy walked the same route without thinking about it. The path wasn't in her memory.

It was in the air.

They felt her before they saw her.

Same rooftop.

Same fire.

Same two figures among others who rotated in and out of that space like tides.

The woman noticed first this time.

Smiled.

"Storm's back."

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

"Was it gone?"

The man laughed, low and warm.

"Nah. Just... quieter."

They didn't rush her.

That was the difference.

Last time had been curiosity.

This time was recognition.

She stepped into the space between them, and the air shifted almost immediately. Subtle. Pressure easing, edges softening. Conversations around them got easier, laughter came quicker.

Same pattern.

Stronger effect.

They moved inside eventually, like before. Same broken room. Same view of the ocean cutting into the dark.

But slower.

More deliberate.

They didn't need to figure anything out this time. They already knew where to stand, where to touch, how to move around her.

Shammy didn't direct.

She adjusted.

Small shifts in proximity. Breath. Timing.

The room followed.

At one point, everything stilled for just a second—like the pause before lightning—

Then released again.

After, they stayed closer than last time.

Not clinging.

Just... aligned.

The woman laughed softly, brushing Shammy's arm.

"You always leave the place better than you found it?"

Shammy considered that.

"I don't leave it worse."

That was enough.

Return — Motel / Locked Vectors

Dawn again.

Same room.

Same positions, almost without thinking.

Ace in the chair.

Mai by the wall.

Shammy on the bed.

No one rushed to speak.

This time the silence was shorter.

Ace:

"Same girl."

Mai's eyebrow lifted slightly. "Expected."

"Less... noise," Ace added after a moment.

That was as close as she got to elaborating.

Mai nodded once.

"Kiro. Again."

Ace glanced at her. "Better?"

Mai considered.

"More efficient."

Shammy's voice, softer:

"Same two."

Ace looked over. "And?"

Shammy's eyes shifted slightly, like tracking something distant.

"They adjusted."

That was it.

No one needed more.

A beat.

Then:

"Still works," Ace said.

Mai pushed off the wall this time without hesitation.

"Of course it does."

Shammy didn't move.

She didn't need to.

They came together in that same unspoken way—no urgency, no proving, no escalation. Just contact. Familiar. Grounding.

Different from the night outside.

Not less.

Just... theirs.

Night City didn't forget faces.

But the triad didn't leave anything behind that mattered.

They returned.

Every time.

And that was the only constant the city never managed to break.

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