

# Black File — Interlude: “Extra Large Problem”



Papa John’s was not built for operational disputes.

It was built for speed, cheap cheese, and the quiet understanding that no one stayed longer than necessary.

It failed immediately at the third point.

---

Ace was already seated.

Straight-backed, still, composed. No excess movement, no wasted attention. In front of her, an empty tray that didn’t yet understand what it was about to be used for.

Mai remained standing for a moment before sitting—not out of hesitation, but evaluation.

Table. Angles. Sightlines. Entry points.

Then she sat.

Shammy leaned against the wall.

“Still not convinced this is a good idea,” she said.

Ace didn’t look at her.

“Not required.”

---

The door opened.

Theta-24 didn’t enter.

It happened.

Badger came in first, already mid-sentence.

“OH THIS IS PERFECT—public venue, high stakes, witnesses—”

“Heavy carbohydrate load,” Mai added calmly.

Badger stopped.

Looked at her.

“...you ruin everything.”

“Incorrect,” Mai replied. “I quantify it.”

---

Grouse came in next.

No sound. No announcement. No show.

He simply stopped across the table from Ace.

Looked at her.

A moment.

“Confirmed?” he asked.

Ace raised her eyes.

“Confirmed.”

---

That was the challenge.

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HeavenlyFather entered last and paused near the door, as if already reconsidering his life choices.

“...this is unnecessary,” he said.

“THIS is justice,” Badger replied.

“Justice for what?”

Badger pointed at Grouse.

“He lost the drinking round.”

Grouse didn't react.

"Variance," he said.

"YOU PASSED OUT," Badger corrected.

"Temporary shutdown."

---

Shammy rubbed her forehead.

"I can't believe I'm here."

Ace glanced at her.

"You came."

"...that was a mistake."

---

The orders arrived too quickly.

No one asked questions. No one delayed. There was a universal rule in places like this:

If a group looks like they know what they're doing—

don't interfere.

---

The table filled.

Three extra-large pizzas.

One even larger.

And something Badger had ordered that no one acknowledged.

---

Mai looked at the food.

Counted.

Compared.

"...this exceeds reasonable intake thresholds," she said.

Badger grinned.

"That's the point."

---

Grouse sat.

Precise. Aligned. Still.

“Rules,” he said.

Ace leaned forward slightly.

“Eat.”

---

Silence.

Then—

Badger:

“OH THIS IS GONNA BE GOOD”

---

□

The first slice.

Ace took it.

No rush. No performance.

She simply ate.

---

Grouse did the same.

At the same time.

With the same motion.

---

Mai tilted her head.

“...synchronized intake.”

Shammy sighed.

“Please don’t analyze this like a ritual.”

“Everything is a structure.”

“This is cheese.”

---

---

Second slice.

Third.

---

Badger was already standing.

“LOOK AT THIS—THIS IS LIKE—”

“Sit,” HeavenlyFather said.

Badger sat.

Muttering something about “authoritarian suppression.”

---

□

Fifth slice.

No change.

No slowing.

---

Shammy moved closer.

“Okay... this is actually disturbing.”

Mai nodded.

“Metabolic efficiency is unusually high.”

Ace:

“No.”

Mai looked at her.

“No?”

“Normal.”

---

Grouse:

“Agreed.”

---

Badger:

“I HATE BOTH OF YOU”

---

□

Eighth slice.

---

Shammy:

“Okay, this is where normal people stop.”

Ace:

“Noted.”

She didn’t stop.

---

Grouse said nothing.

He kept going.

---

Mai shifted slightly.

“Projected outcome: gastrointestinal failure within—”

“Mai,” Shammy interrupted.

“...yes.”

“Let them suffer.”

“Understood.”

---

□

Second pizza.

---

Badger was back on his feet.

“THIS IS HISTORY”

HeavenlyFather closed his eyes briefly.

“...this is paperwork.”

---

Shammy blinked.

“...wait.”

Badger:

“WHAT”

Shammy:

“...the bet.”

---

Silence.

---

Mai:

“Clarify.”

---

Badger smiled slowly.

“Loser inputs all handwritten Theta-24 reports into the Foundation system.”

---

Silence.

Heavy.

Immediate.

---

Mai:

"...including yours."

Badger:

"INCLUDING mine."

---

Shammy looked at Grouse.

Then Ace.

"...oh no."

---

□

Second pizza, halfway.

---

Grouse slowed.

Barely.

But enough.

---

Ace noticed.

Said nothing.

---

Mai noticed.

"Deviation detected."

---

Badger shouted:

"HE'S BREAKING"

---

Grouse looked up.

At Badger.

---

“...noise.”

---

Badger sat down immediately.

“...okay that was scary.”

---

□

Third pizza.

---

Shammy:

“Why is there a third one.”

Badger:

“BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN THEM”

---

Ace took another slice.

---

Grouse paused.

Just for a second.

---

That was enough.

---

Ace didn't look at him.

But she knew.

---

Mai said it out loud.

“Threshold reached.”

---

Grouse inhaled once.

Deep.

“...continuing.”

---

Shammy:

“you are both insane.”

---

□

Final slices.

---

Badger was standing again.

HeavenlyFather didn't even try to stop him this time.

---

Grouse picked up a slice.

Stopped.

Didn't continue.

---

Silence.

---

Ace finished hers.

---

Set her hand down.

---

Done.

---

## □ **Aftermath**

---

Badger:

“WE HAVE A WINNER”

---

Shammy leaned onto the table.

“...I regret everything.”

---

Mai looked at Grouse.

“Outcome confirmed.”

---

Grouse sat still.

For a moment.

Then:

“...accepted.”

---

Badger nearly exploded.

“OH THIS IS BEAUTIFUL”

---

HeavenlyFather stood.

“...we are not leaving until you sign that.”

---

Mai already had a datapad out.

“Documentation required.”

---

Grouse looked at it.

Then at Badger.

Then back at the datapad.

---

“...hieroglyphics.”

---

Badger:

“YOU’LL LEARN”

---

## □ Epilogue

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Later.

Safehouse.

---

Grouse sat at a table.

In front of him:

A stack of papers.

Badger’s handwriting.

The Foundation system.

---

He looked at the first line.

Paused.

---

“...this is not a language.”

---

Shammy leaned against the doorway.

---

“I warned you.”

---

Mai glanced briefly.

“...pattern recognition may fail.”

---

Ace walked past.

Stopped.

Looked once.

---

“Looks inefficient.”

---

Grouse raised his eyes.

Held her gaze.

A moment.

---

“...noted.”

---

And continued.

---

Because sometimes—

losing doesn't mean you lost.

---

It means you have to live with the consequences.

---

**End.**

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