

# Black File — Interlude: “Mai’s Protocol II — Time Lock”



The food was normal.

That was not reassuring.

---

Table.

Same alignment.

Same precision.

---

But this time—  
something was missing.

---

Shammy noticed first.  
“...where’s the rest.”

---

Mai didn’t look up.  
“There is no rest.”

---

Badger froze.

---

“...what does that mean.”

---

Mai:

“Temporal restriction.”

---

Ace was already seated.

Still.

Watching.

---

Grouse stepped forward.

Measured.

“...acceptable.”

---

Badger pointed at him.

“YOU SAY THAT EVERY TIME AND IT GETS WORSE”

---

HeavenlyFather:

“...correct.”

---

Mai placed a small device in the center of the table.

Minimal.

Silent.

---

A timer.

---

“Rule,” she said.

Flat.

---

---

“One unit per interval.”

A beat.

“Sixty seconds.”

---

Silence.

---

Badger:

“...that’s it?”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

A beat.

“No acceleration.”

---

Shammy:

“...no.”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

Ace:

“Eat.”

---

□

First interval.

---

Everyone took a piece.

---

No problem.

---

Badger:

“THIS IS EASY”

---

Mai:

“Wait.”

---

Timer ticking.

---

Badger stared.

“...why are we not eating.”

---

Mai:

“Constraint.”

---

□

Second interval.

---

Eat.

---

Wait.

---

Badger:

“THIS ISN’T EATING—THIS IS WAITING”

---

Mai:

“Correct.”

---

Shammy leaned back.

“...I hate this more than the last one.”

---

□

Third interval.

---

The rhythm set in.

---

Eat.

Wait.

Eat.

Wait.

---

Ace’s fingers tapped once on the table.

Stopped.

---

Grouse remained still.

Perfect timing.

---

Mai observed.

“Synchronization achieved.”

---

Badger:

“I’M LOSING MY MIND”

---

□

Fourth interval.

---

The waiting became the problem.

---

Food sat.

---

Too long.

---

Shammy:

“...it’s getting worse just sitting there.”

---

Mai:

“Perception shift.”

---

Shammy:

“STOP.”

□

Fifth interval.

---

Badger broke.

Reached early.

---

Mai:

“Invalid.”

---

Badger froze.

“...NO.”

---

Mai:

“You accelerated.”

---

Badger:

“IT WAS ONE SECOND”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

Badger leaned back.

“...this is tyranny.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

---

"...this is structure."

---

□

Sixth interval.

---

Three remain.

---

Ace.

Grouse.

Mai.

---

Shammy watching.

Badger fuming.

---

The rhythm continued.

---

Eat.

Wait.

---

Ace shifted slightly.

---

Not discomfort.

---

Constraint.

---

□

Seventh interval.

---

The silence grew.

---

No banter.

No noise.

---

Just ticking.

---

Shammy:

“...this is worse than pain.”

---

Mai:

“Correct.”

---

□

Eighth interval.

---

Ace moved—

half a second early.

---

Stopped.

---

Corrected.

But—

the break was there.

---

Mai:

“Deviation.”

---

Silence.

---

Ace looked at her.

---

“...noted.”

---

She didn’t continue.

---

## □ **Outcome**

---

Mai:

“Disqualified.”

---

Badger jumped up.

“SHE DIDN’T EVEN EAT”

---

Mai:

“Temporal violation.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

"...accurate."

---

Grouse continued.

---

Perfect rhythm.

---

Finished.

---

"...complete."

---

## □ **Epilogue**

---

Later.

---

Silence.

---

The timer still sat on the table.

---

Inactive.

---

Shammy stared at it.

"...I hate that thing."

---

Badger:

“BURN IT.”

---

Mai:

“Unnecessary.”

---

Ace passed by.

Stopped.

Looked at it.

---

“...inefficient.”

---

Mai:

“Correct.”

A beat.

“Effective.”

---

Grouse stood nearby.

---

“...sustainable.”

---

Ace nodded once.

---

“...noted.”

---

And walked away.

---

Because sometimes—  
it isn't the task—

---

It's the waiting.

---

**End.**

---

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