

Black File — Interlude: “Mai’s Protocol III — Switch”



The table was familiar.

That was the problem.

Same layout.

Same precision.

Same calm before something went wrong.

Shammy didn't even step in this time.

“...no.”

Mai didn't look up.

“Yes.”

Ace was already seated.

Watching.

Badger entered—

stopped—

looked at the table—

then at Mai.

“...what did you do.”

Mai:

“Adaptation.”

Grouse stepped forward.

Measured.

“...acceptable.”

Badger:

“STOP SAYING THAT”

HeavenlyFather sighed.

“...this will escalate.”

Mai placed the plates.

Each one different.

Not identical portions.

Not identical food.

That was new.

Shammy noticed.

“...why are they all different.”

Mai:

“Variation required.”

Badger leaned in.

“...I don't like that.”

Mai placed the timer.

Again.

Badger:

“NO.”

Mai:

“Yes.”

□

“Rule,” Mai said.

Silence.

“Every interval—”

A beat.

“You switch plates.”

Silence.

Badger:

"...no."

Mai:

"Yes."

Shammy:

"Absolutely not."

Mai:

"Required."

Ace:

"Eat."

□

First interval.

Everyone took a bite.

Fine.

Timer ticked.

Mai:

“Switch.”

Badger grabbed his plate tighter.

“...NO.”

Mai:

“Mandatory.”

HeavenlyFather:

“...do it.”

Badger slid his plate.

Slowly.

“...this is wrong.”

□

Second interval.

New plate.

Different food.

Different texture.

Shammy blinked.

"...what is this."

Mai:

"Irrelevant."

Badger:

"IT IS VERY RELEVANT"

Timer.

"Switch."

Badger:

"I JUST STARTED THIS ONE"

Mai:

"Correct."

□

Third interval.

Chaos started.

No rhythm.

No adaptation.

Ace adjusted.

Minimal.

Grouse adjusted.

Precise.

Badger:

“I CAN’T BUILD MOMENTUM”

Mai:

“Correct.”

□

Fourth interval.

Shammy stopped.

“...I refuse.”

Timer.

“Switch.”

Her plate moved anyway.

“...I hate all of you.”

□

Fifth interval.

Badger grabbed the wrong plate.

Mai:

“Incorrect.”

Badger:

“THERE IS NO CORRECT ANYMORE”

Mai:

“Incorrect.”

□

Sixth interval.

Grouse adapted fully.

No hesitation.

No resistance.

Switch.

Eat.

Switch.

Eat.

Perfect loop.

Mai observed.

“Optimal adaptation.”

Ace watched.

Adjusted.

But—

slower.

□

Seventh interval.

Badger broke.

“THIS ISN’T EATING—THIS IS CHAOS”

Mai:

“Yes.”

Badger:

“...oh.”

□

Eighth interval.

Shammy laughed once.

“...this is actually insane.”

HeavenlyFather:

“...correct.”

□

Ninth interval.

Ace reached—

paused—

adjusted—

continued.

Too late.

Mai:

“Deviation.”

Silence.

Ace stopped.

“...noted.”

□ Outcome

Mai:

“Disqualified.”

Badger slammed the table.

“THIS WAS NEVER FAIR”

Mai:

“Correct.”

Grouse continued.

Switch.

Eat.

Switch.

Eat.

Finished.

“...complete.”

□ Epilogue

Later.

The table.

Empty.

Except one plate.

Half-finished.

Unclaimed.

Shammy stared at it.

“...I don't even know whose that is.”

Badger:

“I DON'T WANT TO KNOW”

Mai adjusted a fork.

Slightly.

“System functioned.”

Ace walked past.

Stopped.

Looked once.

“...inefficient.”

Mai:

“Yes.”

A beat.

“Effective.”

Grouse stood still.

“...adaptive structure.”

Ace nodded once.

“...noted.”

And moved on.

Because sometimes—

it isn't about control—

It's about surviving

when control is removed.

End.

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