

# Black File — Interlude: “Mai’s Protocol IV — Load Distribution”



The table was full again.

That was expected.

---

What wasn't—  
was how little it mattered.

---

Shammy didn't even slow down this time.

“...no.”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

Ace was already seated.

---

Grouse took position across from her.

---

Badger looked at the table.

---

Then at Mai.

Then at everyone else.

“...I don’t like this one.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

“...you won’t.”

---

Mai placed the food.

Not equal.

Not assigned.

---

A shared pool.

---

Shammy blinked.

“...what are we looking at.”

---

Mai:

“Distributed load.”

---

Badger:

“...that sounds illegal.”

---

Mai placed the device.

No timer this time.

---

That was worse.



“Rule,” Mai said.

---

Silence.

---

“The total must be consumed.”

A beat.

“You decide who eats next.”

---

Silence.

---

Badger:

“...no.”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

Shammy:

“Absolutely not.”

---

Mai:

“Required.”

---

Ace:

“Eat.”

---



First move.

---

No one moved.

---

Badger pointed.

“YOU go.”

At Grouse.

---

Grouse:

“Accepted.”

---

He ate.

---



Second move.

---

Grouse looked at Ace.

---

“...you.”

---

Ace:

“Confirmed.”

---

She ate.

---



Third move.

---

Ace looked at Badger.

---

“...you.”

---

Badger froze.

“...betrayal.”

---

He ate.

---

Regret immediate.

---

“...why did I agree to this.”

---



Fourth move.

---

Badger pointed at Shammy.

“YOU'RE UP.”

Shammy:

“NO.”

---

Mai:

“Non-compliance invalidates participation.”

---

Shammy stared.

“...fine.”

---

She ate.

---

“...this is manipulation.”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

---

⚖

Fifth move.

---

Shammy pointed at Mai.

“...you.”

---

Mai:

“Accepted.”

---

---

She ate.

No reaction.

---



Sixth move.

---

Mai pointed at Badger.

---

Badger:

“NO—NO—ABSOLUTELY NOT—”

---

Mai:

“Assigned.”

---

Badger ate.

---

“...this is targeted.”

---



Seventh move.

---

The pattern broke.

---

Everyone started choosing—

---

strategically.

---

Badger pointed at Ace.

---

Ace:

“Confirmed.”

---

She ate.

No hesitation.

---

♁

Eighth move.

---

Ace pointed at Shammy.

---

Shammy:

“...I hate you.”

---

She ate.

---

♁

Ninth move.

---

Shammy pointed at Badger.

---

---

Badger:

“STOP PICKING ME”

---

He ate.

---

“...this is bullying.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

“...this is consequence.”

---



Tenth move.

---

Grouse observed.

Calculated.

---

He pointed at Mai.

---

“...optimal.”

---

Mai ate.

---



Midpoint.

The food remained.

---

But now—

everyone was watching each other.

---

Not the table.

---



Badger snapped.

---

“OKAY—NEW RULE—I PICK MYSELF”

---

Mai:

“Invalid.”

---

Badger:

“THIS SYSTEM IS BROKEN”

---

Mai:

“No.”

---



Shammy slowed.

---

“...I’m not doing another one.”

---

Mai:

“You will.”

---

Shammy:

“...I won’t.”

---

Ace looked at her.

---

“...you will.”

---

Shammy sighed.

“...I hate all of you.”

---

She ate.

---

☺

Late phase.

---

The choices got sharper.

---

Badger stopped picking randomly.

---

Started targeting.

---

Grouse.

---

“...you.”

---

Grouse:

“Accepted.”

---

He ate.

---

No hesitation.

---

♁

Ace waited.

---

Watched.

---

Then pointed—

---

Badger.

---

“...you.”

---

Badger:

“OF COURSE IT’S ME”

---

He ate.

---

“...this is personal now.”

---



Final phase.

---

Only a few portions left.

---

Everyone slowed.

---

No one wanted the next pick.

---



Mai spoke.

---

“Completion required.”

---

Silence.

---



Grouse moved first.

---

He pointed at himself.

---

“...accepted.”

---

He ate.

---

Badger:

“...that was illegal.”

---

Mai:

“Within rules.”

---

⚖

Last portion.

---

Silence.

---

Everyone looked—

not at the food—

but at each other.

---

⚖

Ace pointed.

---

“...Grouse.”

---

Silence.

---

Grouse looked at the portion.

Then at Ace.

---

A beat.

---

“...accepted.”

---

He ate.

---

Finished.

---

## □ **Outcome**

---

Mai:

“Load completed.”

---

Badger:

“THIS WAS WAR”

---

Shammy leaned back.

“...this was worse than all of them.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

“...yes.”

---

Grouse nodded once.

---

“...optimal distribution.”

---

Ace:

“Effective.”

---

## □ Epilogue

---

Later.

---

Empty table.

---

No leftovers.

---

Shammy:

“...I feel manipulated.”

---

Badger:

“I WAS TARGETED”

---

Mai:

---

“System functioned.”

---

Ace walked past.

Paused.

---

“...inefficient.”

---

Mai:

“Yes.”

A beat.

“Effective.”

---

Grouse stood still.

---

“...balanced.”

---

Ace nodded once.

---

“...noted.”

---

And moved on.

---

Because sometimes—

it isn't the food—

---

It's who decides

---

who carries it.

---

**End.**

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