

Chapter 5: Sync

The Arasaka job was three days away.

Three days to learn the city. Three days to understand Shammy's board. Three days to figure out if the triad still worked.

They trained.

Not formally. Not with exercises or drills. Shammy took them through Night City—through Watson, through Heywood, through the districts that would matter for the job. She showed them the routes. The choke points. The places where Arasaka had eyes and the places where they didn't.

The city revealed itself in layers, each one more complex than the last. The surface layer was what tourists saw—neon signs blazing with advertisements for products nobody needed, holographic dancers moving perpetually across building facades, the constant hum of commerce and desire. Streets crowded with people selling things, buying things, being things. Food vendors calling out prices in languages that mixed and merged until they became something new, something distinctly Night City. The smell of synthetic meat grilling over open flames, the chemical sweetness of drinks designed to provide energy without nutrition, the particular quality of desperation packaged as opportunity and sold to people who couldn't afford either.

But underneath that was the infrastructure layer—the power cables running through the walls like veins, the water pipes and data lines that carried information faster than any human could process. The maintenance tunnels that most people never saw, the service corridors that connected buildings in ways that weren't on any public map, the hidden pathways that fixers knew and runners memorized. The veins of the city, hidden behind chrome facades and neon advertising, carrying the blood and breath of a metropolis that never stopped moving.

And underneath that was the survival layer—the routes that fixers used, the safe houses that runners knew, the shadows where people disappeared and the light where they were seen. The places where deals happened, the corners where information exchanged hands, the doors that opened only if you knew what to say. The particular texture of a life lived in the gaps between systems, where the rules were different and the consequences were immediate. This was where Shammy had built her existence, where she had learned to navigate the spaces between legal and illegal, between safe and dangerous, between surviving and thriving.

Mai catalogued it all automatically. The patterns of patrol routes, the timing of security rotations, the blind spots in surveillance coverage. The numbers scattered and reformed, scattered and reformed, but the pattern recognition was there. Underneath. The shape of the sync that had held them together for decades.

“You don't fight Arasaka on their turf,” Shammy said. Her voice was flat. Professional. The same voice she'd used since the Afterlife, since Viktor's clinic, since the board. “You move through it. Fast. Clean. You don't stop. You don't engage. You get in, you get out.”

“Engagement probability—” Mai started. The numbers were already cascading—Arasaka patrol frequency, security rotations, sight lines, escape routes. The probabilities flickered at the edge of her consciousness, fragmenting when she tried to hold them, reforming when she let them go.

“Stop calculating.” Shammy's warmth flickered. Just for a moment. “You can't calculate Arasaka. Their security rotations change. Their patrols shift. You move on instinct and information, not probability.”

“Instinct.”

“Instinct.” Shammy's voice was steady. “Or pattern recognition. You watch long enough, you see the gaps. You move through the gaps.”

The gaps. Mai tracked them automatically—the way security patrols left blind spots near loading docks, the way maintenance schedules created windows, the way the electromagnetic fields shifted around Arasaka buildings, creating interference patterns that masked small movements. The numbers were there. They were just... scattered. Harder to calculate. Harder to hold.

Ace was watching. Near the window, where she always stood. Her violet eyes tracked movement on the street below, tracked the patterns of light and shadow, tracked the way people moved and the way they didn't. Her shadow flickered against the chrome—the fragment pushing, her pushing back, the constant negotiation between control and chaos.

“Pattern recognition,” she said. Her voice was quiet. “We had that.”

“We did.” Shammy's warmth came back. Just for a moment. Just enough. “Vector sync. We'll see if it survived.”

—

The sync.

Mai remembered it. The moment when the triad moved together. No communication. No signals. Just knowing. Ace's depth vector—shadow, void, silence. Mai's horizontal vector—calculation, grounding, tactics. Shammy's vertical vector—atmospheric lift, the storm that cleared the way.

They'd moved as one. For years. Before the portal. Before the fifty years. Before everything changed.

The vectors had names. Depth. Horizontal. Vertical. Each one was a piece of the whole. Each one was necessary. Ace's shadow created the absence that let them move unseen. Mai's grounding held the center, provided the anchor, made sure the others could move without losing connection. Shammy's storm cleared the way, created the pressure that opened doors and closed them behind.

Together, they were something that none of them could be alone. The sync was more than coordination. It was knowing. The shape of the triad, moving through the world like water through cracks.

Now they stood in an abandoned lot in Pacifica, where Shammy had brought them to practice. The buildings around them were half-destroyed, hollowed out by conflicts Mai hadn't been present for, their walls decorated with graffiti that glowed in the neon from distant signs. The ground was cracked concrete, weeds pushing through the gaps, the occasional shimmer of broken glass catching the light. The smell was different here—less industrial, more organic. The decay of abandoned spaces, the growth of plants that had found purchase in concrete cracks.

Pacifica was different from Watson, different from Heywood. This was where Night City forgot to finish building. Construction projects abandoned when the money ran out, when the corporations moved on, when the district became more trouble than it was worth. The buildings here weren't just old—they were incomplete, skeletons of structures that had never been finished, frameworks that had never been filled in.

“Show me,” Shammy said. Her voice was flat. “Show me what you remember.”

Ace moved first.

Not fast. Not slow. Just movement. Shadow flowing from one position to another. The way she'd always moved—economical, precise, her body disappearing into the darkness between buildings, reappearing in angles that shouldn't be possible.

The fragment's presence flickered at the edge of Mai's awareness—not active, not intrusive, but there. The violet tinge that said Ace was pushing herself, was reaching for something that she couldn't quite touch. Her katanas stayed on her back. This wasn't about combat. This was about presence. About the void she created when she moved, the absence of light and sound that made her impossible to track.

Mai's brain started calculating—probabilities of engagement, escape routes, cover positions, the angles and vectors that would let her cover Ace's movement while staying grounded—

“Stop calculating.” Ace's voice. Quiet. Present. “Feel it.”

Feel it. Mai's hand pressed against the wall of a collapsed building. Cool. Solid. The numbers were still there, still scattering, still buzzing at the edge of her consciousness like static on a radio. But—

The ground. The positions. The angles. She didn't need to calculate. She knew where Ace would be. Where Shammy would be. Where she needed to be.

Horizontal. Grounding. The position that held the others together.

She moved.

Not calculated. Not planned. Just movement. Her disruptor was in her hand—when had she drawn it?—and her body was flowing into position, the place where she needed to be, the angle that covered Ace's advance and Shammy's lift.

The numbers scattered. Reformed. Scattered.

And then—

—Shammy moved.

The storm. The atmospheric lift. Mai had forgotten what it felt like—the way the air shifted when Shammy engaged, the way pressure built and released, the way the world seemed to tilt sideways when the vertical vector activated. The wind picked up, not from any direction, just from everywhere at once. The debris on the ground shifted, small pieces of rubble and glass moving in patterns that didn't follow gravity.

Shammy's hands moved, and the air moved with them. The storm wasn't violent—it was controlled, directed, the kind of precision that came from decades of practice. The kind of power that could level buildings or just move individual pieces of debris. The kind of control that said I know exactly what I'm doing.

For a moment—one breath, one heartbeat—the sync was there.

Ace's shadow. Mai's calculation. Shammy's storm.

Just a moment. Just a breath. The pattern recognition, rusty but present. The vectors that had made them a triad.

Then Shammy stumbled.

Just slightly. Just enough. The atmospheric lift faltered, the pressure released, and the moment broke. The sync collapsed back into three separate people, standing in an abandoned lot, the neon flickering above them.

“Sorry.” Her voice was flat. “I’m—I haven’t done that in—”

“Fifty years.” Mai’s voice was flat. “The probability of sync degradation is—”

“Don’t.” Shammy’s warmth was gone. “Don’t calculate it.”

“I’m not calculating.” Mai’s hand pressed against her disruptor. Cool. Solid. “I’m observing. We moved together. For a moment. The pattern recognition is still there.”

“It’s rustier than I expected.” Shammy’s voice was quiet. The kind of quiet that said she was comparing this moment to another moment, to fifty years ago, to a time when the sync had been automatic, when it had been effortless. “I’ve been working alone. For fifty years. The sync—I haven’t had anyone to sync with.”

Ace moved to Shammy’s side. Not touching. Just present. The way she’d always been—shadow presence, the absence of absence, the kind of support that didn’t need to announce itself.

“We’ll practice,” she said. Her voice was quiet. “Every day. Until the job.”

Shammy’s warmth flickered. “Every day. Until it comes back.”

—

They practiced.

In the mornings, they walked the route for the Arasaka job. Shammy showed them the choke points. The places where Arasaka patrols moved. The gaps in security. The way the electromagnetic fields shifted around the buildings, creating interference patterns that could hide movement if you knew how to use them.

The Arasaka district was cleaner than Watson—wider streets, better lighting, chrome that gleamed instead of rusted. The buildings were taller here, more polished, the kind of architecture that said corporate money and corporate power. The security presence was visible but not oppressive—cameras at every corner, drones circling in patterns that seemed random but weren’t, guards at checkpoints that seemed casual but weren’t.

But underneath the polish was the same infrastructure, the same survival layer, the same gaps that fixers had learned to exploit.

“The patrols change every seventeen minutes,” Shammy explained. “But they don’t change all at once. They rotate in waves. You watch the first wave, you learn the pattern, you time your movement for the gap between wave two and wave three.”

Mai’s brain catalogued the information automatically. Seventeen minutes. Wave patterns. Gaps. The numbers were still scattered—she couldn’t calculate the precise probabilities—but the pattern recognition was there. Underneath the scattered numbers. Underneath the electromagnetic interference.

The Arasaka guards were different from Maelstrom. Professional. Corporate. The kind of training that came from structured programs, from standardized protocols, from budgets that allowed for real equipment and real maintenance. Their chrome was newer, shinier, the kind of upgrades that came from corporate sponsorship rather than street-level scrounging.

"They're not looking for fights," Shammy said. Her voice was flat. Professional. "They're looking for reasons to escalate. Don't give them one. You move through, you don't engage, you don't give them anything they can use."

In the afternoons, they trained in Pacifica. The sync came back slowly. Imperfectly. But it came. Ace's shadow—her movement, her presence, the way she disappeared into angles that shouldn't exist. Mai's grounding—her position, her calculation, the way she held the center while the others moved. Shammy's storm—her atmospheric manipulation, her pressure and release, the way the world tilted when she engaged.

The vectors. The triad. The shape they'd been.

Each practice session was better than the last. Not dramatically—there was no moment where suddenly everything clicked, no instant where fifty years of separation vanished—but incrementally. The hesitation decreased. The micro-movements that should have been automatic started becoming automatic again. The knowing returned, piece by piece.

At night, they returned to Shammy's apartment. Mai studied the board. Ace watched the city. Shammy made tea.

The tea ritual had become a thing. Ace would check the water temperature—exact, precise, the kind of precision that came from her irrelevant obsession with proper preparation. The kettle had to be at the right temperature. The steep time had to be measured. The cups had to be chosen for weight and feel.

Shammy would pour. Mai would hold her cup and press her palm against the ceramic, grounding herself in the warmth and the solidity while her numbers scattered and reformed.

The apartment was becoming familiar. The smell of old chrome and solder. The electromagnetic hum that Mai felt in her teeth. The board in the corner, with all its strings and connections. The empty chair that still sat in the other corner, waiting.

Mai noticed something on the fourth day.

"You bought a third chair," she said.

Shammy's warmth flickered. The kind of flicker that said she hadn't expected this observation, hadn't expected Mai to notice, hadn't expected anyone to say anything.

"I did."

"You kept the empty chair for fifty years. And you bought a third chair."

"I did." Shammy's voice was steady. Not defensive. Just stating a fact. "For now. For practice. For—"

"For us." Ace's voice came from near the window. Her violet eyes were steady. "You bought a chair for us."

Shammy's warmth came back. Just for a moment. The kind of warmth that said thank you for noticing, thank you for saying it, thank you for understanding.

"I've been booking jobs for people with half your skill and twice your ego," she said. Her voice was quiet. "For fifty years. I've been watching people work together. Move together. Trust each other." Her voice was quiet. "I've been alone. The board—the contacts—that was work. That was survival. But the sync—the sync is different."

"You had partners," Mai said. Her voice was flat. "Martinez. Others."

"I had partners." Shammy's voice was steady. "Work partners. Job partners. Not—" She stopped. The kind of stop that said she was choosing her words carefully, that she was trying to explain something that didn't translate easily. "Not triad partners. Not sync partners. The sync is different."

"The sync is trust." Ace's voice was quiet. "You can work with partners without trusting them."

"Yes." Shammy's warmth was back. "The sync is trust. And I haven't had that in fifty years."

Mai's hand pressed against the table. Cool. Solid. Real.

"The probability that trust degrades over time—"

"Stop calculating trust." Shammy's voice was warm now. The kind of warm that said she understood what Mai was trying to do, even if she couldn't do it through numbers. "Trust isn't probability. Trust is—"

"Seeing." Ace's voice. Quiet. "You don't calculate it. You see it."

Shammy's warmth flickered. Then settled. The kind of settling that said this was the right word, this was the right way to say it.

"Yes. Seeing. I see you. I see that you're still you. Even after the portal. Even after the displacement. You're still Ace. You're still Mai." Her voice was quiet. "And I'm—"

"You're Shammy." Mai's voice was flat. "The probability that you're different is statistically certain. Fifty years. You're different. But you're still Shammy."

Shammy's warmth came back. All the way. The kind of warmth that said yes, exactly, that's it, that's the thing I've been trying to say.

"I'm still Shammy." Her voice was steady. "Different Shammy. Fifty-years-later Shammy. But still Shammy."

Ace moved from the window. She walked to the table. To the three chairs—Shammy's original, the empty one in the corner, and the new one Shammy had bought.

She sat in the new one.

The chair made a sound when she sat—not a creak, exactly, but a settling. A new chair, finding its shape. Finding her weight.

Mai followed. Sat in the empty chair—the one Shammy had kept for fifty years. The one that had been waiting.

The chair was old. She could feel it in the wood, in the fabric, in the way it held her weight differently than the others. Fifty years of waiting. Fifty years of emptiness. And now—

Shammy stood for a moment. Looking at them. At the chairs. At the board. At the life she'd built.

Then she sat.

The triad, at a table, for the first time in fifty years.

The sync wasn't perfect. The trust wasn't complete. The numbers were still scattered, Mai's calculations still buzzed at the edge of her consciousness, still fragmented when she tried to hold too much at once.

But the chairs were full.

From:

<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/blackfile:triad-night-city:chapter5?rev=1774637103>

Last update: **27/03/2026 18:45**

