

[← Chapter 25](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 27 →](#)

Chapter 26 — Horizontal

Mai found the flaw.

It was in the pattern. The web of the Source. Every thread was a choice. Every intersection was a person. And at the center, the Triad held the convergence open.

But the pattern wasn't perfect.

There were gaps. Places where threads didn't connect. Places where choices had been erased before they could be made. Holes that looked like silence. That looked like nothing.

The optimization hadn't just contained memories. It had contained possibilities.

And those possibilities were trying to return.

"The web has holes," Mai said.

They stood before the Source. Ace on one side. Shammy on the other. Mai in the center.

"What kind of holes?" Ace asked.

"Choices that were never made. Futures that were prevented. People who were optimized before they could choose."

"Can they be restored?"

"I don't know." Mai's pen moved across her notebook. Lines that didn't connect. Nodes that led nowhere. "The third path is open. But the gaps. The optimization erased more than memories. It erased potential."

Shammy's hand came up. Electricity flickered.

"I can feel them. The gaps." She frowned. "They're empty. Not absent. Just not filled."

"Because the people who would have filled them were erased."

"Yes."

Mai calculated.

The web was vast. Every choice, every person, every possibility. And at its center, the Triad held it open. But the gaps were spreading.

Not dangerous. Just incomplete. Like a sentence with half its words removed.

“Can we close them?” Ace asked.

“Not close. Fill.” Mai's voice was steady. The way it got when she was working through a problem. “The Source shows possibilities. We show people their choices. And when they choose, they fill the gaps.”

“That's it?”

“That's the third path.” A beat. “Not fixing the past. Choosing the future.”

They went to work.

Mai walked the city. Found the gaps. Showed the people there what the Source offered. Not just memories but possibilities. Futures they could choose.

And one by one, they chose.

Not always the path Mai would have picked. Not always the easy path. Their path. Their choice.

And the web filled.

The gaps closed.

Slowly. Gradually. As people chose their futures, the pattern became whole.

Not perfect. Not fixed. But real.

And Mai's map, the horizontal spread of the optimization, finally dissolved.

The cities to the north and south weren't contained anymore. They were connected. Part of the same web. Making their own choices. Getting them wrong. Getting them right.

“It's done,” Mai said.

She stood at the edge of the plaza. Ace beside her. Shammy behind.

The Source hummed above. The web glowed. At the center, the Triad stood.

Three vectors. Three perceptions. Three keys.

Holding open the door to the future.

“What now?” Ace asked.

Mai's hand found Ace's. Held it.

“Now we live. We face what comes.”

A pause.

“Together.”

end of chapter twenty-six

[← Chapter 25](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 27 →](#)

© 2025-2026. “World of Ace, Mai and Shammy” and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

Check out our SubscribeStar page at <https://subscribestar.adult/konrad-k>

From:

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

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/novellas:optimized-out:chapter26>

Last update: **23/04/2026 16:19**

