

[← Chapter 23](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 25 →](#)

---

## Chapter 4: Integration

The choice hung in the sterile air of the safehouse.

Three days since Morocco. Three days since Iman's voice had resonated through Mai's consciousness. Three days since the mathematics of existence had been offered like a knife. Something that could cut both ways.

Mai sat at her desk. The Catalogue open. Pages she could read now, not because the lock had opened, but because she was beginning to see. The ritual mathematics were becoming clear. Not numbers. Patterns. The architecture that held reality together.

"You're different." The mechanical bird in Ace's palm. Wind, unwind. "Since Morocco. You're different."

"I'm seeing things I couldn't see before." Mai's hand pressed flat against the desk. The tremor was less now. Copper and static, but controlled. "The math is... it's everywhere. In the containment architecture. In the Fragments. In the way reality holds itself together."

*She's beginning to understand.* Violet's presence pressed against Ace's consciousness. *The Anchor taught her. She's learning to see the way we see.*

"Is that good?" Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. "Learning to see like you?"

*It's necessary. If she's going to help us disrupt the collector, she needs to understand the mathematics. But understanding changes you. You stop seeing numbers. You start seeing... everything.*

---

Shammy's atmospheric sense reached out. The safehouse was sterile. Climate-controlled, nothing breathing. But she could feel Mai's presence differently now. Not just human calculation. Something else. Something that saw the patterns in the air itself.

"You're integrating." Shammy's warmth was soft. "The way Ace is integrated. The way Iman is integrated."

"I'm learning." Mai's tone was precise, but the edges were different. Less cold. More... connected. "The math isn't separate from reality. It's part of reality. The Scattered didn't just break into pieces. It broke into patterns. Equations that hold themselves together."

"And if you learn those equations..."

"I can change them." Mai's hand pressed flat. "I can disrupt the collector's control. But I'll also be seeing the wanting. The gathering instinct. The part of the Scattered that calls to the Hunter."

*That's the risk.* Violet's presence expanded. *The more you understand, the more you feel. The*

*gathering isn't just something the Fragments do. It's something the math wants. The equations are trying to re-form.*

"The math wants to gather?"

"The math is the Scattered." Mai's voice was precise. "The equations that hold reality together, they're not separate from the entity. They are the entity. When I learn to see them, I'm learning to see the Scattered. And the Scattered wants to be whole."

---

The mechanical bird in Ace's palm. The rhythm of tension and release.

Youssef sat in the corner. His Fragment was quieter now. Learning. The way Ace had learned. The way Violet taught. But his eyes followed Mai with something like recognition.

"You're seeing it too." Youssef's voice was soft. His Fragment gave him understanding beyond his years. "The patterns. The wanting. You're learning to see."

"I am." Mai's tone was precise. "But I'm also calculating. The wanting is there. But the calculation can choose."

"Can it?" Youssef's Fragment pressed against his consciousness. "Can you choose not to want? When the math itself is calling?"

*That's the question. Violet's presence shifted. The math wants. The fragments want. The hosts... the hosts can choose. But the wanting is always there. You learn to negotiate. You learn to integrate. But you never stop wanting.*

"Then how do you survive?" Mai's hand trembled. "How do you hold the wanting without becoming it?"

*You hold. Violet's presence expanded. You negotiate. You remember what you were before the wanting. Ace holds a mechanical bird. It's not important. It has no purpose. But she holds it. She winds it. She unwinds it. The rhythm reminds her that she's still herself.*

---

Shammy's atmospheric sense felt the shift in the room. The pressure patterns. The way reality held itself together.

"The mechanical bird." Shammy's warmth was soft. "That's why you hold it. Not because it's important. Because it's not important. It reminds you that you're still you."

"The wanting is always there." Ace's shadow-pressure pushed. "Violet wants to be whole. She wants to gather. But I hold the bird. The rhythm of tension and release. It reminds me that I'm not just the wanting. I'm also the holder. The one who winds. The one who unwinds."

*The one who chooses. Violet's presence pressed. That's what integration means. You're not just the host. You're not just the Fragment. You're the space between. The one who decides.*

"And the collector?" Mai's hand pressed flat. "The one who's forcing the gathering?"

"The collector is using the wanting. The math is there. The patterns are there. But they're being forced." Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. "The captured Fragments aren't choosing. They're being made to want. The collector isn't integrating. They're controlling."

*That's why the Anchors matter.* Iman's Fragment-voice resonated from the communication device. The Morocco holder had been teaching Mai remotely. Patterns transmitted through frequencies that only Mai could see now. *The one who controls the reformation controls what the Scattered becomes. If the collector captures enough pieces, they can force the reformation. They can make us into something we don't choose to be.*

---

Dr. Bright's call came at 03:17.

The secure line. Foundation channels. His voice was clinical. But the tension was different now.

"We have a problem." Bright's voice carried weight. "The Arctic Station. The last named holder. It's not a person."

"What is it?" Mai's tone was precise.

"A containment pod. Something the Vatican sealed forty years ago. They call it the Anchor, but it's not a Fragment. It's..."

"The largest piece." The shortest sentence. "The piece that remembers. The Anchor holds the memories of the Scattered."

"It's waking up." Bright's voice was tight. "The extraction activity, the agitation frequency, it's been affecting the containment. The piece inside is becoming active. And something else is happening."

"The Hunter." Shammy's warmth contracted. "It's being drawn."

"The Hunter's resonance signature is spiking. The closer the pieces get to each other, the stronger the Hunter becomes. We're tracking it approaching the Arctic. But that's not the only problem."

"What else?"

"The collector has been spotted. En route to the Arctic. They're not just gathering signatures anymore. They're gathering hosts. Three Foundation personnel have gone missing in the last week. All of them had Fragment resonance potential."

"They're preparing containers." Mai's hand trembled. "They're going to try to capture the Arctic piece. And they're going to use human hosts to do it."

*If they capture the Anchor...* Violet's presence expanded. *They'll have the memories. They'll know what the Scattered was. They'll be able to control the reformation.*

"Can you get there first?" Bright's voice was clinical. "The Foundation can provide transport. But the Arctic Station is... problematic."

"Problematic how?" Shammy's atmospheric sense reached through the communication.

"It's sealed. Climate-controlled. Sterile. Your atmospheric abilities will be compromised."

"I'll manage." Shammy's warmth was thin. "I've managed before."

"The containment architecture is anti-ritual." Bright continued. "Mai, your abilities will be dampened. The station was designed to suppress Fragment activity. It's why the piece was stored there."

"Then we need to get there first." Ace's mechanical bird wound and unwound. "Before they can capture it."

---

The transport left at dawn.

Arctic coordinates. The last named Fragment holder. The piece that remembered.

Mai sat with the Catalogue open. The pages rearranged themselves as she read. Not because the lock was opening, but because she was beginning to see the mathematics that held them together. The patterns. The equations.

"The Arctic piece is called the Anchor." Mai's tone was precise. "But it's not just the largest piece. It's the center. The piece that all others orbit around. If the Scattered were to reform, the Anchor would be the core."

*That's why the collector wants it. Violet's presence pressed. If they control the Anchor, they control the reformation. They can make us into what they want.*

"And if we get there first?" Ace's shadow-pressure expanded.

"Then we learn what the Scattered was. What it wanted. Why it chose to break." Mai's hand pressed flat. "The Anchor holds the memories. If we integrate with it, we'll know everything."

*But integration means gathering. Violet's presence shifted. The more pieces I hold, the closer the Hunter comes. The more whole I become, the more I want to gather. If I absorb the Anchor...*

"You become what the Scattered was." The shortest sentence. "You become whole."

*And the Hunter comes for me anyway. Whether the collector forces it or I choose it. The Hunter comes for wholeness.*

"Then the question isn't whether the Hunter comes." Mai's tone was precise. "The question is what the Scattered becomes when it reforms. And who controls what it becomes."

---

Shammy's atmospheric sense felt the pressure changing. They were leaving the continent. The air was becoming thinner. Colder. The sterile atmosphere of high altitude.

"The Arctic Station." Shammy's warmth was minimal here. "How bad will it be?"

"Bad." Bright's voice came through the communication. "The station was built over a rift. A wound in reality. The containment architecture suppresses everything. Fragments, rituals, atmospheric manipulation. It's designed to keep the Anchor asleep. Permanently."

"Then how do we access it?"

"You don't." Bright's voice was clinical. "The station is autonomous. No human personnel. The containment is maintained by the architecture itself. The only way to interact with the Anchor is to break the containment. Which will wake it."

"And draw the Hunter." Ace's mechanical bird stopped ticking. "Everything that wakes the pieces draws the Hunter."

"Yes."

"Then we're racing." Mai's hand pressed flat. "The collector. The Hunter. Us. Whoever reaches the Anchor first controls what the Scattered becomes."

*Or destroys it. Violet's presence expanded. The Anchor can be destroyed. If it's destroyed, the memories are lost. The Scattered can never reform completely. The gathering stops. The Hunter loses interest.*

"The collector could destroy it?" Shammy's warmth was thin.

*The collector wants to control it. But if they can't have it... they might destroy it to prevent us from having it. The math allows both options.*

"Then we need to get there first." Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. "Before the collector. Before the Hunter. Before the choice is taken from us."

---

Youssef's Fragment stirred. The child's presence, confused, learning, wanting, pressed against Ace's awareness.

*What happens if you absorb the Anchor? Youssef's presence pressed. What happens to you?*

*I become whole. Violet's presence expanded. I remember everything. I become what I was before the scattering. But...*

*But?*

*But I'm not the only one. The collector has three pieces. The child holds one. The Anchor is one. If I absorb the Anchor, the math shifts. The gathering accelerates. The pieces start pulling toward each other.*

*And Ace?*

*She holds me. She negotiates. But if I become whole... if I remember everything... I might not be Violet anymore. I might be something else. Something that doesn't need a host.*

*What happens to Ace then?*

Violet's presence shifted. The wanting was there. The need to gather. But also something else. Something that had grown in twenty years of integration.

*I don't know. That's the part I've never told her. If the Scattered reforms, if I become whole, what happens to the hosts...*

*I don't know.*

The transport descended toward the Arctic.

The sterile white of ice. The sealed station. The containment architecture that suppressed everything.

Shammy's atmospheric sense contracted to nothing. The air here was dead. Nothing breathing. Nothing moving. The pressure systems that had been her ally were gone.

Mai's ritual mathematics faded. The patterns were still there, but harder to see. The containment architecture was dampening everything. Suppressing everything.

Ace's shadow-pressure remained. The void that made rooms feel smaller. The presence that pressed against consciousness.

But even Violet felt the suppression. The wanting was still there, but distant. Muffled. Like a voice through water.

"The station." Mai's tone was flat. "It's designed to keep the Anchor asleep. But it's also designed to keep hosts away. We're being suppressed."

"Can you still see the math?"

"Barely." Mai's hand pressed flat. "The patterns are there. But the containment is making it hard to read."

"The collector will have the same problem." Shammy's warmth was non-existent. "This place suppresses everything."

"Then we have time." Ace's mechanical bird wound and unwound. "Time to reach the Anchor. Time to choose."

*Or time to fight. Violet's presence pressed. The collector is coming. The Hunter is coming. The choice is being taken from us. One way or another.*

---

The station was empty.

Cold. Sealed. Nothing breathing.

The containment pod sat in the center. Not dormant. Stirring. The extraction frequency had been affecting it. Even suppressed, even asleep, the Anchor was waking.

And beneath the waking, something else.

The Hunter's resonance signature.

Approaching.

---

END OF CHAPTER FOUR

[← Chapter 23](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 25 →](#)—

© 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:vatican-manuscripts:chapter24>

Last update: **23/04/2026 16:20**

