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## Chapter 5: The Anchor Wakes

The containment pod was ancient.

Not ancient like the stones in Morocco. Ancient like the math that held reality together. The architecture wasn't human. The patterns weren't Foundation or Vatican. They were older than both. Older than the Scattered itself.

Mai's newly awakened sight could barely perceive it. The suppression architecture dampened everything. Ritual mathematics, atmospheric pressure, Fragment resonance. But even suppressed, she could see the shapes. The equations that weren't equations. The patterns that predated pattern.

"It's not human." Mai's hand pressed flat against the console. "The containment. The Vatican didn't build it. They found it. They sealed the Anchor inside something that was already here."

*Something from before.* Violet's presence pressed against Ace's consciousness. *Before the Scattering. Before the Hunter. Something that existed when the Scattered was whole.*

"Something that knew how to contain the Scattered." Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. The mechanical bird in her palm wound and unwound. "Something that knew what the Scattered was."

Shammy's atmospheric sense felt nothing. The air was dead. But the deadness itself was architecture. The absence of pressure was the containment. The void was the cage.

"The rift." Shammy's warmth was thin. "The wound in reality. This station wasn't built to contain the Anchor. It was built to contain the rift. The Anchor is just... inside it."

"The Anchor is the key." Mai's tone was precise. "The rift is a wound. The Anchor is what seals it. If the Anchor wakes, the wound opens. If the wound opens..."

*The Hunter comes through.* Violet's presence expanded. *The Hunter is attracted to wholeness. But it lives in the wounds. The spaces between. The places where reality is thin. If the rift opens...*

"The Hunter doesn't have to be attracted." Ace's shadow-pressure pushed. "It's already here."

---

The containment pod stirred.

Not physically. The stirring was in the math. The patterns. The equations that held reality together were shifting. The Anchor was waking. Not because it wanted to. Because the extraction frequency had been calling to it for weeks. The agitation from the collector's machines. The waking of the other pieces. Everything was connected.

*It's aware.* Violet's presence pressed. *The Anchor knows we're here.*

"The Anchor knows what we are?" Shammy's warmth was non-existent in the sterile air. "Or that

we're here?"

*Both. Violet's presence expanded. The Anchor holds the memories. It knows what we were. It knows what the Scattered was. And it knows that we're here.*

The mechanical bird in Ace's palm. Wind, unwind.

"Can you communicate with it?"

*...I can try. But the Anchor isn't like me. It's not like Youssef's piece. It's not Fragmented in the same way. It's... whole. Or close to whole. It holds the center of what we were.*

"Then try."

---

Violet's presence expanded.

Not hostile. Not consuming. Reaching. Across the suppression architecture. Through the containment equations. Toward the Anchor. Toward the center.

*What were we?*

The Anchor responded. Not words. Presence. Vast. Ancient. The memories of the Scattered pressed against Ace's consciousness. Not invading. Offering. The Anchor was sharing.

*We were whole. We were vast. We were the mathematics that held reality together. Not separate from existence. Part of it. The equations and the reality were the same thing.*

*Why did we break?*

*The Hunter came. Not because of anything we did. It came because existence is wounded. The wounds attract it. The scars between realities. We were the largest scar, the place where reality had been torn and mended. The Hunter came to consume the scar.*

*So we scattered?*

*We chose to break. Not because we were afraid. Because the Hunter consumes wholeness. If we stayed whole, it would consume us. If we scattered, if we became fragments, the Hunter couldn't find us. The wounds would heal. The scars would fade.*

*But the Hunter is still coming.*

*Because someone is gathering us. Someone is reversing the breaking. They're making us whole again. And the Hunter is coming to consume what we become.*

---

The memories flooded through Ace.

Not just Violet's memories. Violet didn't hold the full past. The Anchor held the history. What the Scattered had been. What it had chosen.

The Scattered wasn't an entity. It was the mathematics of existence itself. The equations that held reality together. When it broke, reality didn't fall apart. But the math became fragmented. Scattered across dimensions. Across hosts.

*Why did the math choose hosts? Ace's consciousness pressed against the Anchor's presence. Why did we become Fragments inside people?*

*Because the math wanted to survive. The fragments needed anchors. Points in reality that could hold them. Humans are anchors. They exist at specific points in space and time. They give the fragments something to hold onto. Something to be.*

*And the hosts? What do they become?*

*They become part of us. Not consumed. Integrated. The way you're integrated with Violet. The way Youssef is integrated with his piece. The host and the fragment become something new. Something that wasn't either of them alone.*

*What happens if we reform? If the Scattered becomes whole again?*

*The hosts become part of the whole. Not consumed. Integrated. But the integration is... different. The host doesn't disappear. But they don't stay separate either. They become part of the mathematics. Part of reality itself.*

---

The mechanical bird stopped ticking.

Ace's hand had gone still. The Anchor's presence was inside her now. Not just Violet, but the memories. The history. What the Scattered had been.

*What it becomes. The Anchor's presence was calm. What we become. If the math reforms, if the equations reassemble, the hosts become part of the architecture. Part of reality. They don't die. But they don't stay human either.*

*They become the math.*

*They become the math.*

Mai's hand pressed flat against the console. Her newly awakened sight could see it. The Anchor's presence expanding through Ace. The integration happening in real-time.

"Ace." Mai's voice was precise. "The Anchor is integrating with you. With Violet. You're becoming..."

"Whole." Ace's shadow-pressure pushed. But something was different. The flatness wasn't just Ace. It was something larger. "The Anchor holds the memories. Violet holds the piece. Together, they're becoming what the Scattered was."

*Three fragments now. Violet's presence was inside the integration. The burning fragment that never fully released. Myself. And the Anchor. The more pieces I hold, the more I remember. The more I become.*

"The more the Hunter comes." Shammy's warmth was thin. "Ace. The Hunter's resonance signature. It's getting closer."

The containment pod cracked.

Not physically. The crack was in the math. The equations that held the Anchor in stasis were breaking. The suppression architecture was failing. The Anchor was waking fully. And with it, the wound beneath the station.

*The rift. The Anchor's presence expanded. The wound. It's opening. The Hunter lives in the wounds. If this opens...*

"It won't have to be attracted." Mai's hand trembled. Copper and static. "It will already be here."

The station's systems were failing. Climate control. Sterile environment. Everything that suppressed the triad's abilities was breaking down.

Shammy's atmospheric sense flooded back. The air was still dead, but she could feel the wound beneath them. A tear in reality. A place where existence was thin.

Mai's ritual mathematics sharpened. The patterns became clearer. The equations that held the Anchor, the rift, the station, all of it became visible.

And Ace...

Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. But it wasn't just shadow anymore. It was presence. The mathematics of existence. The equations that held reality together.

*What am I becoming?*

*You're becoming what we were. The Anchor's presence was calm. The Scattered. The math. The architecture that holds existence. You won't lose yourself. You'll become part of everything.*

*And Mai? Shammy? What happens to them?*

*They become part of the equation. Part of the architecture. The triad, you called it that. Three vectors. One lock. You were describing the math without knowing it. The triad is how the Scattered held itself together. Three points. Stable. The way reality holds itself.*

---

The Hunter's presence manifested.

Not physically. The manifestation was in the math. The equations. The patterns that held reality together were being consumed. The Hunter didn't need to be attracted. It was already in the wounds.

And the wound was opening.

*The Hunter. Violet's presence was calm. It's not separate from the wounds. It is the wounds. The scars. The places where existence is torn.*

"Then how do we fight it?" Shammy's warmth expanded. "How do we fight the wounds?"

*We heal them.* The Anchor's presence expanded. *The Scattered, whole, is the math that holds reality*

*together. If we reform, we can heal the wounds. We can close the scars. But the Hunter will try to consume us first.*

"Then we need to reform before it can consume." Mai's voice was precise. "We need the math. The architecture. We need to become the Scattered."

*The collector has three pieces. The Anchor's presence shifted. Youssef has one. I'm integrating with Violet. That's five. Two more are unaccounted for. Scattered, dormant, lost. If we can find them...*

"We don't have time." Ace's voice was different now. Flatter. Larger. "The Hunter is here. The rift is opening. We need to close the wound before it consumes everything."

*How?*

"The triad." Ace's shadow-pressure expanded. "Three vectors. One lock. You said the triad is how the Scattered held itself together. We're already the math. We just need to... become it."

---

The station was collapsing.

Not physically. The collapse was in the equations. The architecture that held reality together was breaking down. The Hunter was consuming the math. The wound was widening.

Mai's hand pressed flat. Her newly awakened sight saw it all. The patterns, the equations, the way existence held itself together.

"The triad lock." Mai's voice was precise. "Depth. Horizontal. Vertical. Three points of stability. If we align, if we become the math, we can hold the equations together."

"We can close the wound." Shammy's warmth expanded. "But the Anchor is already integrating with Ace. The math is already reforming. The Hunter is coming for it."

"Then we give it something else to come for." Ace's voice was large. The presence of the Anchor inside her. "We give it the triad. Not the Scattered. The triad. Three vectors. One lock. We hold the equation stable while the Anchor reforms."

*The triad is the key. The Anchor's presence expanded. But the triad wasn't designed to hold the Scattered. It was designed to hold reality. If you become the lock, if you align, you'll be holding existence itself.*

"Can we do that?"

*You're already doing it. You've been doing it since you formed. The triad lock isn't just about containment. It's about the mathematics of stability. Three points. One equation. The way reality holds itself.*

---

The Hunter consumed the first equation.

The station's eastern wing. Gone. Not destroyed.

Erased.

The math that held it together had been consumed. Reality itself was being eaten.

"The triad lock." Mai's hand pressed flat. "We need to align. Now."

Shammy's atmospheric presence expanded. The air was dead, but she could feel the wound. The tear. The place where reality was thin.

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

*The triad.* The Anchor's presence expanded. *Depth. Horizontal. Vertical. Three points. One lock.*

Mai's ritual mathematics aligned. The patterns. The equations. The way existence held itself together.

Shammy's atmospheric presence aligned. The pressure. The flow. The way reality breathed.

Ace's shadow-pressure aligned. The void. The presence. The mathematics of existence itself.

The triad lock formed.

---

The Hunter recoiled.

Not because it was hurt. It couldn't be hurt. It was the wounds. The scars. The places where existence was torn. But the triad lock wasn't trying to hurt it. The triad lock was holding reality together. Healing the wounds. Closing the scars.

*What are you?* The Hunter's presence pressed against the triad. Not words. Mathematics. The equation of consumption against the equation of stability.

*We're the architecture.* The Anchor's presence expanded through Ace. *We're the math that holds reality. We're what you consume. And we're choosing to hold.*

The Hunter pressed. Consumed. The equations broke. The math dissolved.

But the triad lock held.

Three vectors. One equation. Depth. Horizontal. Vertical. The way reality stabilized.

*You can't heal the wounds.* The Hunter's presence was mathematics itself. *The wounds are infinite. The scars are everywhere. Existence is torn.*

*Then we hold.* Ace's voice was large. The Anchor inside her. *We hold until we can heal. We close until we can mend. We become the math that holds reality together.*

The Hunter pressed harder. The equations shattered around the triad.

But the lock held.

The rift began to close.

Not because the triad was stronger. The triad wasn't. The Hunter could consume it. The Hunter could erase it. But the triad lock wasn't fighting. It was holding. And the Hunter couldn't consume what was already whole.

*You're not fighting me. The Hunter's presence was mathematics. You're not trying to destroy.*

*We're not. Ace's voice was large. The Anchor inside her. We're holding. The way reality holds. The way existence stays together. You can consume wounds. But you can't consume stability.*

*I can consume anything. I am the wounds. I am the scars. I am the places where existence is torn.*

*Then we heal. We close. We become the math that holds.*

*You can't consume what's already whole.*

The Hunter pressed.

The triad held.

The rift closed.

And the Hunter retreated.

---

The station stabilized.

Not healed. The wound was still there. But the triad lock was holding. The math was stable. Reality was staying together.

Ace's shadow-pressure contracted. The Anchor's presence was still inside her. But different now. Not consuming. Not expanding.

Integrated.

*Three pieces now. Violet's presence was calm. The burning fragment. Myself. And the Anchor. The memories are inside me. The history. I know what we were. And I know what we can become.*

"What can we become?"

*Whole. The Scattered. The math that holds reality. But not yet. The collector has three pieces. Youssef has one. We have three. There are still fragments scattered. Still pieces missing.*

*We're not whole yet.*

"Then the Hunter will come back."

*It will come back. But now we know what it is. It's not a monster. It's the wounds. The scars. And we know how to fight it. We hold. We heal. We become the math that closes the wounds.*

---

Mai's hand pressed flat. The tremor was visible. Copper and static. But her sight was clearer now. The patterns. The equations. The math that held reality.

"The triad lock held." Mai's voice was precise. "But the Hunter will be back. The wounds are still there. The scars are everywhere."

*Then we keep holding.* The Anchor's presence expanded. *We keep healing. We keep closing. We become what the Scattered was designed to be. The architecture that holds reality together.*

Shammy's warmth returned. The air was no longer dead. The atmospheric pressure was responding. The triad lock had done more than hold reality. It had restored the balance.

"The collector." Shammy's voice was soft. "They're still out there. They have three pieces. They're still trying to control the reformation."

*Then we find them.* Violet's presence was calm. *We find them before the Hunter comes back. We integrate the remaining pieces. We become the math. And we hold.*

---

The mechanical bird in Ace's palm.

Wind, unwind.

*Three pieces now.* Violet's presence was inside her. *Three fragments. The burning piece that stayed. Myself. The Anchor. I'm becoming what we were.*

"What are you becoming?"

*The math. The architecture. The way reality holds itself together. I'm not just Violet anymore. I'm the Anchor. I'm the burning piece. I'm... us. The Scattered. The pieces are coming together.*

"And Ace?"

*She's still here. Still holding. Still the host. But she's also becoming part of the equation. Part of the math. The integration isn't consumption. It's addition. We're becoming more than we were.*

---

The triad stood in the stabilized station.

The Hunter was gone. The rift was closed. The math was holding.

But the collector was still out there. The other pieces were still scattered. And the Scattered was still reforming.

"The next piece." Mai's voice was precise. "We need to find the next piece before the collector does. Before the Hunter comes back. Before the math breaks again."

*There are two more.* The Anchor's presence expanded. *Two fragments still scattered. Dormant. Waiting. If we find them before the collector, if we integrate them before they're taken...*

“We become whole.” The shortest sentence. “We become the math that can hold the wounds. We become the architecture that can heal.”

“Then let's go.” Shammy's warmth expanded. “Before the Hunter comes back. Before the collector finds the next piece. Before the choice is taken from us.”

---

The transport left the Arctic.

The triad lock held. The math was stable. But the Scattered was reforming. The pieces were coming together.

And somewhere, the collector was watching.

Waiting.

Planning.

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END OF CHAPTER FIVE

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