

Volume 2 - Chapter 7 - Inheritance I

With a simple flick of his wrist, the Rune priest seemed to pluck the star from the holographic display between them, as though it were a tangible object, and bring it into reality.

It hovered above his right hand, spinning faintly, as he began to alter its size, making it grow larger with each subtle movement of his fingers.

“This star,” he began, “is merely a *representation* of the Inheritances and their polarities, crafted specifically for teaching new Psykers.”

As he spoke, his fingers danced around the star, shaping it like a sculptor with clay. “There are some flaws I take issue with—its depiction of the Inheritances order within the Void is wrong, and it doesn’t quite capture the interplay of the Inheritances as well as I’d like—but it serves its purpose well enough. It’s not perfect, but for our purposes, it’ll do.”

Satisfied with his adjustments, he gave the star a slight nudge, sending it gliding gently toward Thea.

She watched, transfixed, as the now-larger object floated towards her, its size previously around the area of her palm, but now comparable to one of the pancakes she had eaten that morning.

It was a stunning 12-pointed star, gleaming as though it were crafted from polished silver or some other similarly gray-coloured, shiny metallic substance. Each point housed a gem, each one a different, vibrant color that seemed to pulse faintly, like the rhythmic beating of a heart.

Thea’s eyes followed the gems, captivated by their shifting hues, until her gaze rested on the center of the star.

At its heart was what looked like a motionless, swirling spiral, placed within a perfectly circular frame. The spiral was crafted from twelve sleek, interlocking blades, each angled in a precise counterclockwise arrangement that converged at a singular point in the very center.

The intricate, iris-like design reminded Thea of the security hatches she had seen aboard the UHF space station and aboard the Sovereign as well, the kind used to seal ventilation and maintenance tunnels—functional, yet strangely elegant in their construction.

“That...” she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

There was something about it—something familiar yet utterly alien.

The Rune priest caught the whisper and smiled knowingly. “Yes... That is the representation of the *Gate*, as *all* Psykers perceive it. It is one of the very few constants in the Psychic world. No matter your Inheritance, your unlocked Powers, or your investment in Perception, Resolve, Psychic, or Presence, the Gate always appears just like this.”

Thea nodded slightly, unable to look away from the center of the star.

It looked exactly as it *should*—yet she had no idea *why* she felt that way.

After all, she had never seen her Gate up close before... *or had she?*

A sudden, sharp pain pierced her head, like a bolt of lightning.

She winced, instinctively pressing her fingertips to her temples to ease the ache.

“Are you alright, Thea?” the Rune priest asked, his tone shifting from calm authority to genuine concern. “If this is too overwhelming, tell me, and we can pause. The Psychic world is vast and complex, and we’ll spend countless hours exploring it together. There’s no need to push through discomfort right away.”

“I’m fine,” she said quickly, her words sharper than she intended. She dropped her hands from her temples and straightened up, forcing her expression to remain neutral.

Inside, though, her mind raced.

The last thing she wanted was for him to think she wasn’t cut out for this—she *could not* afford to be cast aside, not now, not when she was finally beginning to understand what the fuck was happening to her and her strange Psychic Powers.

The Rune priest’s gaze lingered on her, as though weighing her words, but he said nothing.

Taking a steadying breath, Thea glanced back at the star, letting its silvery light and shifting colors refocus her thoughts.

After a moment, she spoke, more carefully this time. “It’s just... the Gate,” she began hesitantly. “It feels *familiar* somehow, even though I’m *positive* I’ve never seen it up close before—not like this, with all these details. I don’t know why, but it’s like it feels like I *have* seen it up close before, despite *knowing* I never have...”

The Rune priest tilted his head slightly, his expression unreadable as he absorbed her words.

For a long moment, he appeared to sink into deep thought, his brow furrowing faintly. Then he offered, almost as though thinking aloud, “It could be a remnant from your Awakening visions. Many Psykers catch glimpses of the Gate during that process, even if they don’t necessarily recognize it as such at the time.”

“No,” Thea said immediately, her voice sharper than she’d intended, surprising even herself.

She took a steadying breath, forcing the tension from her shoulders as she continued, her tone quieter but no less firm. “It wasn’t that. I’d remember if it was. There’s no way I’d forget *anything* about that nightmare.”

She paused, her jaw tightening as the spectre of those memories loomed at the edges of her mind, threatening to push their way in.

Her voice dropped to a murmur, almost as if speaking aloud might make the memories more real. “That... horror-show is burned into my mind. Which, by the way, I definitely have *a lot* of questions about.” She swallowed, shaking her head slightly. “But this—this is different.”

The Rune priest’s eyes lit up with something between amusement and approval, and a booming laugh burst from him, echoing in the vast training hall.

“Good! Very good,” he said, his tone suddenly warm, like a proud mentor praising a pupil. “I’d hope you do have questions about it, Thea. If you didn’t, you wouldn’t be worth teaching. Curiosity, even when it stirs up the deepest, most primal kind of terror within you, is the mark of a true learner—a worthy pupil, indeed!”

His laughter faded, and his expression turned serious as he leaned slightly closer, his sharp gaze fixed on her. “*That said*, it is puzzling why you might not remember the Gate... Much like the Gate’s appearance is immutable among Psykers, so is the memory of it. Everyone remembers their first time seeing their own Gate up close, whether they realize it’s the Gate at the time or not...”

He cupped his chin as he sank into thought, a low, resonant hum escaping him—a sound Thea had already grown familiar with during her time in the training hall so far.

Thea’s eyes drifted once more to the center of the star, unable to look away from the spiral’s intricate design. Her thoughts churned, searching for answers she couldn’t quite grasp.

‘The Gate... Why is it so familiar...?’

The silence stretched between them, broken only by the Rune priest’s steady hum, which filled the air like a strange, rhythmic background noise. It was almost comforting in its familiarity, even as her own unease refused to dissipate.

Half a minute passed in near silence, with Thea staring intently at the center of the star, her thoughts a tangled knot of questions, and the Rune priest stroking his chin, lost in his own musings.

Finally, the Rune priest broke the quiet, his deep voice gently resonating through the training hall.

“That is a very puzzling thing indeed,” he began. “*But* it seems we won’t come to any real conclusions about it right now. I *do* have a few ideas on how we might jog your memory, but honestly, it’s not a pressing matter. There’s no inherent benefit to recalling the details of your Gate—as long as you’re already able to open and close it at will. And according to the Assessment reports I reviewed about you, that’s something you’re capable of doing.”

Thea nodded confidently at the implied question.

If there was one thing she was sure of in her Psychic abilities, it was this.

Opening and closing her Gate had been the first thing she’d focused on learning after the nightmare that had been her Awakening, to make sure it had not chance of happening again—since, at the time, she hadn’t realised the Awakening was a one-time thing.

“Very well,” the Rune priest said, giving a firm nod of approval. “Then let’s move forward with the Inheritance Polarities for now. We’ll circle back to your Awakening questions and memory exercises later in the session, if that works for you. The two are closely connected, you see—jogging your memory will be much easier when we are already having you dive deep into your memories to recall something else.”

“That is fine with me, Rune priest. Thank you for your consideration,” Thea replied, inclining her head in a polite bow.

The Rune priest waved a hand dismissively, as though brushing away an errant fly. “No need for that, child. We’ve much to cover, and formality like that wastes time. Now, let us continue with this,” he gestured toward the holographic display.

“There are twelve Inheritances that exist,” the Rune priest began, gesturing toward the glowing star before them. “Each one is represented by a point of the star and a colored gem. Every Inheritance has its own unique color, and that, as far as we can tell, is a hard-set fact of the universe. These colors are immutable—unchanging—just like the appearance of the Gate, no matter how someone tries to interpret them.”

He paused, a faint chuckle escaping him as if amused by a memory. “As a matter of fact, this *was* tested *extensively*: When Psykers first became a studied subject, scholars were utterly baffled. Every single Psyker who could perceive the colors described them exactly the same way, regardless of their cultural, societal, or planetary backgrounds.”

Thea’s brow furrowed slightly, a question forming in her mind, but she chose not to interrupt, her curiosity held in check by the Rune priest’s storytelling.

“They even tried to see if color-blind individuals would perceive the colors differently,” he continued, his voice tinged with amusement. “You can imagine how tricky that was—asking someone to describe a color they’ve literally never seen before or even have the capacity to perceive. It was... well, a *fascinating* mess.”

He leaned forward slightly, lowering his voice as though sharing some grand, forbidden secret. “But the real intrigue came with the later trials. The scholars asked themselves, ‘*What about people who were born completely blind? People who have never had a single photon of light touch their retinas—could they perceive the same colors?*’”

Thea found herself leaning in without realizing it, drawn by the quiet intensity of his words.

Her eyes widened as the implications began to sink in. The idea of conducting an experiment like that was downright mind-boggling. ‘*How would you even begin to...?*’ she wondered. ‘*How could someone who’s never seen light begin to perceive colors, and how could they describe them in any meaningful way?*’

“They struggled with that very question for decades,” the Rune priest continued. “Progress was painfully slow, and for the longest time, it seemed impossible to make any real breakthroughs... that is, until the Allbright System appeared.”

Thea straightened slightly at that, her curiosity piqued even further.

She knew, intrinsically, that the System was an unfathomable entity of unimaginable power, of course, but she hadn't heard much about the advent of the System. Of the early years after it suddenly appeared, much less about how it impacted humanity as a whole.

"With the advent of the System," the Rune priest explained, "humanity was granted tools that would have been otherwise deemed impossible—not just tools of war, but tools that revolutionized *science* as well. You see, not every Ability granted by the System is designed *purely* for combat. Some have applications that reach far beyond the battlefield."

He waved his hand over the holographic datascreen, and a new display materialized in the air before him. A shortened System Ability description flickered into view, its format instantly recognizable to Thea from her own Abilities and the ones she'd reviewed together with the rest of Alpha Squad.

The Rune priest turned the screen toward her, waiting patiently as her eyes scanned the text.

[Active (Silver) - Beholder's Eyes]

Allows the Participant to see through the eyes of another. This connection breaks if the two Participants are beyond a specified distance from each other.

"As it turns out," the Rune priest continued after she finished reading, "the System doesn't particularly care whether the eyes in question are *functional* or not. Even for those born blind, this Ability can do two remarkable things. First, it grants them sight through another person's eyes. And second—and *far* more fascinating—it allows others to perceive how the other individual's brain interprets visual input, even if their own eyes have *never* functioned, and thus, their brain has never interpreted visual inputs at all."

Thea's mouth fell open slightly as the implications hit her. "So... they could see what *blind* people 'see'?" she asked hesitantly, trying to wrap her mind around the concept.

"Exactly," the Rune priest said with a nod. "Using this Ability, scientists were able to confirm, after much trial and error—and, admittedly, after a few participants became... let's just say *mentally indisposed* by their brains' inability to process unfamiliar visual data—that even blind people naturally perceive the Inheritances in these *exact* twelve colors. Isn't that fascinating? A phenomenon so universal that even the complete and utter absence of sight cannot change it at all."

Thea nodded slowly, her brow furrowing in thought. "It really is fascinating," she admitted. "Strange, but... definitely fascinating. To think that something like that is just... *universal* to such an overwhelming degree..."

Her earlier question bubbled to the surface again, and before she could second-guess herself or the Rune priest started another one of his stories, she asked, "But what did you mean earlier, about the people who can perceive the colors of the Inheritances? Is there something specific needed for that?"

The Rune priest's face lit up, his expression one of approval and excitement.

“Ah, a sharp question, Thea! I’m glad you asked. Yes, there *is* indeed a requirement. Only a very particular *type* of Psyker can actively see the colours of the universe around them; or rather, only a Psyker with a very particular *Inheritance*.”

He gestured toward the star with a sweeping motion, its vibrant points shimmering in the air between them. “Much like you have the Veritas Inheritance, which allows your [Eyes of the Void] Power to reveal the Truth of the universe as the Void perceives it, this other Inheritance grants a similar capability. It allows the [Eyes of the Void] Power, when channelled through it, to show the *colours* of the universe as the Void perceives them—including the colours of Inheritances within any individual you look at.”

Thea’s eyes widened slightly as she considered this. “So... someone with this Inheritance can just look at a person and see what their Inheritance is? Like, *directly*?”

“*Precisely*,” the Rune priest said, his voice steady and deliberate. “It’s a powerful tool for gathering information in warfare, but it’s much more than that. This singular Inheritance has shaped our understanding of *all* Inheritances and the interplay between them. Without it, much of what we know today might have remained an unsolvable mystery forever.”

He leaned forward, his sharp eyes locking onto Thea’s.

With a deliberate gesture, he pointed to the iridescent white gem positioned at the 11-o’clock point of the star.

“This,” he said, his tone heavy with significance, “is your Inheritance, Thea. *Veritas*. Represented by the colour universally agreed upon as ‘Luminous White.’ It embodies the fundamental aspect of the Void that governs *Truth*—both the Void’s *Truth* and the *Truth* as it manifests within our universe.”

Thea’s eyes followed his hand to the glowing gem, but her mind was already struggling to keep up with the explanation.

“You’ve already experienced some of its capabilities,” the Rune priest continued. “Through your [Eyes of the Void] Power, you can pierce through stealth, see perfectly in darkness, and shatter illusions. Anything that stands between your eyes and the Truth is directly countered when your [Eyes of the Void] channels the power of Veritas. This is the essence of your Inheritance—it is a force that ensures clarity, no matter what forces attempt to obscure it; be it technology, another Psyker, or even physics itself, such as with the absence of light.”

Despite her best efforts, Thea felt her thoughts tangling into knots as she tried to follow the explanation. The *words* made sense, but their combined meaning and complexity pressed down on her like a heavy book she couldn’t quite open.

For the umpteenth time in the past hour, she found herself wishing Karania were there.

Her genius friend would have broken the Rune priest’s intricate teachings into smaller, more *Thea-friendly* chunks, complete with step-by-step tutorials she could actually understand.

The worst part was, that she didn’t even feel like the Rune priest was a bad teacher; the topic was simply too complicated for her to understand on the quick like this.

The Rune priest paused in his explanation as though sensing her struggle.

With a slight shift in his posture, he leaned back in his chair, raising a hand.

A shimmering light formed in the air, solidifying into the shape of a giant lens. It looked almost comical, like a disembodied half of a giant's glasses, floating impossibly in the training hall between them.

"Let me show you," the Rune priest said softly, his tone warm and reassuring as the enormous lens hovered in the air between them, refracting light in mesmerizing patterns.

"Sometimes, seeing is easier than understanding through words alone."

Thea leaned forward in her chair, her gaze fixed on the lens.

She desperately hoped this demonstration would clarify the concepts that had slipped just beyond her grasp, much like the previous one with the rocks had done.

The Rune priest, thankfully, seemed to have a knack for breaking things down into digestible pieces—though it often took her a second or third attempt to fully grasp them.

"Let's start with [Eyes of the Void] as our baseline Power for this explanation," he began, his voice calm but deliberate. "This Power allows your eyes—your literal sight, as shaped by your Perception—to see as the Void itself does."

As he spoke, he waved a hand, summoning a small, chibi version of Thea's head that floated into view. Its exaggerated, cartoonish features brought an involuntary smile to Thea's face.

'Cute...!'

The Rune priest continued, gesturing toward the floating chibi head. "In its raw form, [Eyes of the Void] doesn't actually reveal much of anything. Our universe's physical laws are far more dominant than those of the Void, at least in this plane of existence. Without any specific focus through an Inheritance, using [Eyes of the Void] is essentially like looking with your normal eyesight—a complete waste of Psychic Energy."

To illustrate his point, the Rune priest directed the chibi-Thea toward the lens.

The tiny, animated head furrowed its brows dramatically as it peered through the lens, first from one side, then the other, its exaggerated expressions somehow making the demonstration both clearer and more amusing.

Thea watched intently.

Yet, as the chibi floated back and forth, she did notice that nothing seemed to change at all.

Whether the chibi-Thea head peered through the lens from her side or the opposite, there was no discernible difference in what it saw—everything remained unchanged.

“See?” the Rune priest said, his tone playful but with an unmistakable air of instruction. “Without an Inheritance to channel it, [Eyes of the Void] is completely inert—no more than your regular sight.”

He straightened slightly, his expression shifting to one of focus. “This changes *dramatically*, however, when you use your Inheritance as intended: As a lens for your Power. Powers are the basic applications of your Psychic Energy—they set the shape and initial parameters for what you, as a Psyker, can do. Your Inheritance, then, acts like a lens, bending and reshaping that foundation in its own unique way, depending on which Inheritance is being used.”

With a flick of his wrist, the lens hovering between them shifted, taking on a yellow hue.

“Think of it as placing a sheet of colored, translucent paper over a pane of glass. The glass itself doesn’t change, but everything you see through it is tinted by the paper.”

The chibi-Thea head on the opposite side of the lens now appeared with a yellow tint, as if viewed through a poorly tinted window.

“Each Inheritance has its own ‘color,’ so to speak,” the Rune priest continued, the lens shifting again, now cycling through red, green, blue, white, and back to yellow. “This color metaphorically ‘tints’ the outcome of your Power, giving it a distinct influence. While the Power itself remains the same, the way it manifests—the perception of what you see—changes depending on the lens of your Inheritance. For Veritas, *your* Inheritance, this manifests in the abilities I’ve mentioned before: Breaking illusions, seeing through stealth, and perceiving perfectly even in complete darkness.”

As he spoke, the lens changed yet again.

This time, it wasn’t colored; instead, it seemed to warp and distort everything visible through it.

Thea squinted at the chibi-Thea head, confused as nothing appeared to change—until suddenly, she realized the floating figure had transformed into a chibi version of the Rune priest.

“*Wha—?*” Thea began, her words faltering as her mind struggled to process the unexpected shift.

The Rune priest gave a knowing smile and flicked his fingers again, causing the chibi head to float around the lens.

The moment it left the lens’ reach, it reverted back to the familiar chibi-Thea.

“A simple illusion,” the Rune priest explained matter-of-factly. “The head you see now, representing me, was covered by an illusion of your own face this entire time. The Veritas lens merely revealed the Truth behind it, breaking the illusion completely. Without the Veritas lens, the illusion remains intact and you see yourself, instead of me.”

Thea stared at the lens, understanding beginning to sink in as her mind replayed the demonstration.

The chibi-Thea's transformation into the Rune priest's likeness was jarring, but the way Veritas so effortlessly stripped away the deception left her awed.

"This fundamental idea of the Inheritance lensing applies to *all* Powers, not just [Eyes of the Void]," the Rune priest continued.

With a snap of his fingers, the lens dissolved into a shimmer of light, and the chibi-Thea head floated for a moment longer before bursting like a balloon.

Thea couldn't help but flinch slightly at the sudden pop.

"With other Powers, this lensing effect becomes a lot more esoteric and complicated to explain, which is why I didn't lead with them," he added. "Powers don't *need* to be used through an Inheritance lens, but as you've seen with scaling, you'll quickly understand why you almost always *want* to as a Psyker. Inheritances are massive power multipliers, but they come at the cost of versatility. You can't change the *nature* of your Inheritance, only *how much* of it you choose to channel into a given Power."

The Rune priest rose unexpectedly from his chair, his movement startling Thea.

She struggled with indecision of heavily ingrained instincts—should she stand as well, as she was taught during basic; or remain seated like he had said at the start of the lesson?

Her uncertainty must have shown, as he made a subtle hand gesture signaling her to remain seated, and she relaxed slightly, grateful for the clarity.

He stepped closer, his boots tapping softly against the floor, and knelt before her.

Stretching out his hand, he conjured a tiny flame that flickered to life in his palm, its warm glow casting gentle light across his features.

"Let's use a Fireball as an example," he said. "It's one of the first Powers a Psyker exploring any of the Fire Paths unlocks. Its simplicity makes it easy to understand, and the changes an Inheritance makes to it are significant enough for a clear demonstration."

He paused, the flame dancing steadily in his hand, before letting out a deep sigh. "For the sake of completeness, I *must* admit we're glossing over an entire segment of Psychic tutoring here—*Intent*. It's a critical piece of the puzzle, but it's far too dense to tackle today. My old teacher would crucify me for skipping it—she was an absolute stickler for doing things *by the book*—but trust me when I say we'll get to it in due time. For now, let's keep things manageable."

Thea nodded quickly, relief flooding through her.

'*Simpler is definitely better!*' she thought, grateful for the Rune priest's decision to prioritize clarity over overwhelming detail today. There was so much to learn, that even just the basics were far too overwhelming at first glance.

Thea leaned forward slightly, her eyes fixed on the tiny flame dancing in the Rune priest's outstretched hand, eager to see what came next.

"*Thank you,*" the Rune priest muttered unexpectedly, his tone soft and genuine, as if Thea had just done him a great favor.

She blinked, momentarily taken aback, unsure of what she'd done to warrant his gratitude.

But before she could ask, he carried on, his tone returning to its usual instructional cadence.

"The humble Fireball Power," he began, "is as straightforward as it sounds. It conjures a burning flame that can be thrown and explodes upon reaching its destination or impact. For this demonstration, we'll use its most basic functionality—no complex Intent, no Inheritances—just a straight trajectory and an explosive impact, much like a grenade. As a marine, you should be intimately familiar with grenades from your pre-Integration basic training, so this should be easy enough to follow."

Thea nodded quickly when she noticed the Rune priest had paused, clearly waiting for her approval to proceed.

"So, let's start with how it functions by default," he said.

With a small motion of his fingers, the flame rose from his palm, hovering in midair for a moment before shooting forward, propelled by an invisible force.

It streaked through the air in a perfectly straight line, cutting through the air with a truly unnatural grace. The tiny flame soared roughly thirty meters, slamming into the treeline at the far edge of the clearing. The impact triggered an explosion, sending a large fireball roaring outward and scattering smaller flames like shrapnel from a grenade.

Thea's eyes widened at the spectacle, her pulse quickening at the sheer destructive potential of something so seemingly simple.

The trajectory alone was mesmerizing.

The flame hadn't arched or wavered *at all*—it had flown in a flawlessly straight line, as if gravity, air resistance, and the rules of physics themselves had simply bowed out of its path.

'*Damn,*' she thought, her mind immediately conjuring scenarios where such a Power could have been a game changer. '*I wish I had that during the Assessment...!*'

The idea of an endless supply of grenades that flew perfectly straight, required no space to carry, and seemingly ignored the laws of nature was almost intoxicating.

The Rune priest's soft chuckle drew Thea's attention back to him. She met his gaze, her own excitement mirrored by the thoroughly amused expression on his face.

"If this is already enough to spark your awe," he teased, his smile widening, "then we'll need to take things *very* slowly. Otherwise, I might lose my newest potential pupil to a heart attack—or something equally as dramatic—*far* too early."

Thea felt her face begin to flush and was about to school her expression into something more neutral, but before she could even put the thought into action, the Rune priest raised both hands in a placating gesture.

“*Don’t*,” he said gently, his tone surprisingly earnest. “*Please*, don’t. Just... let yourself react as naturally as you need to. Enjoy this moment—seeing the world of a Psyker for the first time—*exactly* as it feels to you. It’s been far, far too long since I’ve seen someone truly infatuated, awestruck, and delighted by Psychic Powers. It’s... *refreshing*.”

There was something in his voice—a faint undertone of loneliness that Thea couldn’t quite place. It lingered in the air for a moment, leaving her unsure of what to say.

But considering the Rune priest seemed to be decades, if not centuries, old, the thought didn’t seem entirely out of place.

‘*It makes sense,*’ she thought quietly. ‘*It must be lonely to be that far above everyone else...*’

“I will, Rune priest,” she promised earnestly despite the whirlwind of thoughts in her head.

The Rune priest’s grin widened at her words, his amusement softening into something closer to satisfaction. “Wonderful!” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together lightly before conjuring another flame into existence.

“Now,” he continued, the small flame flickering between his fingers, “let us see what happens when we apply an Inheritance to the very same Fireball Power. Take note: This is the *exact same* Power, with the *exact same* Intent. I won’t be influencing either of those factors at all. Nor will I add more energy to it. The *only* difference is that I’ll be channeling my own Inheritance through it.”

Thea’s focus sharpened as she watched intently, wondering what kind of Inheritance someone as powerful as the Rune priest might possess and what its effects could possibly look like.

Slowly, the flame in his hand began to shift.

Its usual candle-like form melted away, replaced by a more unified, almost serene structure.

The erratic, flickering edges disappeared, leaving behind a perfectly smooth, glowing sphere.

It wasn’t just a ball of fire—it was something more *refined*.

The colors shifted naturally, with deep blue at its core, fading outward into rings of yellow, orange, and red, like a candle flame suspended in a place without gravity.

“My Inheritance is the same one we mentioned earlier: *Aurae*,” the Rune priest explained, his tone measured and calm. “The Inheritance that allows one to see colors. It means, “*Aura*” and is the fourth one clockwise from the top, represented by the colour of ‘Radiant Gold.’”

He gestured toward the corresponding point on the star, the golden gem gleaming faintly. “When applied to a Power, such as the Fireball, Aurae bends its shape to follow the principles of an aura, making the Power adhere more to their rules than to the rules of physics. Watch closely.”

With a subtle motion, he sent the perfectly spherical flame rushing forward, its trajectory mirroring the previous Fireball exactly. It streaked through the air in a flawless straight line, the bright glow reflecting off the trees in the distance.

When it reached the same spot as before, roughly thirty meters away, something unexpected happened.

Instead of exploding in a violent burst or sending fiery shrapnel in all directions, the flame expanded gently, like a bubble growing in slow motion.

The fire began to spread outward, but it didn’t touch the bark or leaves of the surrounding trees. Instead, the flames hovered just beside them, as if respecting their personal space.

The air around the trees shimmered faintly, as though the flames were burning something invisible rather than the physical objects themselves.

Then, just as suddenly as it had grown, the giant ball of fire vanished—not in an explosion, not with a pop or an implosion, but in a way that was unnervingly quiet. It simply dissipated, as though it had never been there, leaving behind the strange, flickering flames that continued to lick the air near the trees.

“What... What am I seeing here?” Thea asked, her voice tinged with confusion and wonder.

She leaned forward slightly, her brows knitting as she tried to make sense of what was happening. Something about the flames was fundamentally different—they existed, yet they didn’t consume. They burned, yet they left no trace of destruction on the bark or the leaves.

The Rune priest smiled faintly, the look of a teacher who had anticipated this very question.

“You’re seeing a demonstration of how the Aurae Inheritance alters the nature of a Power,” the Rune priest explained. “These flames are no longer governed by the physical laws of our universe. Instead, they burn within the *conceptual space* of auras. They embody heat, fire, and destruction, but these effects manifest *solely* within the aura layer—they never touch the physical layer directly. We could walk right through them and not feel a thing.”

He gestured toward the flickering flames with a subtle wave of his hand. “The flames you see now? That’s the tree’s *aura* burning—being consumed and destroyed, piece by piece, until the tree itself dies. No water can extinguish it, no oxygen is needed for it to burn. It is simply aura being consumed as fuel for the fire that will inevitably erase it.”

The Rune priest fell silent, motioning for Thea to keep watching.

Her eyes remained glued to the mesmerizingly silent flames, their flickering movements consuming the invisible aura of the tree bit by bit.

At first, it seemed like nothing was happening.

The tree stood tall, its leaves unshaken, its bark unmarked.

But as she continued to watch, the subtle changes became impossible to miss.

The bark began to ripple, its once-smooth surface cracking and splitting, the edges curling inward as it dried. The vibrant green leaves shifted, the color fading as if seasons were rushing through them in mere seconds. They turned yellow, then deep red, then brown, before they crumbled away entirely, falling silently to the ground.

Even the branches themselves started to react.

They curled inward, twisting unnaturally as the Aurae flames continued their relentless work.

Thin cracks appeared along their lengths, growing larger until, one by one, the branches splintered and broke, falling with a soft snap into the growing pile of debris below.

In mere minutes, the tree had been reduced to nothing but an empty husk.

Its once-sturdy trunk was hollow, the bark brittle and paper-thin.

The flames, as if sensing their task was complete, winked out of existence without a sound, leaving behind a hauntingly barren silhouette surrounded by dried, brittle branches and crumbling leaves scattered on the ground like ashes.

Thea exhaled slowly with wide eyes, her breath catching in her throat.

The display was both breathtaking and *thoroughly* horrifying.

It was all too easy for her to imagine this fire having been applied to a human's aura, instead of a tree's...