

Full Excerpt: On the Question of the Lens

Friends. Colleagues. Academic rivals.

Let us begin, as we always do, with the admission that keeps our field humble:

We do not know what an Inheritance is.

Do not mistake my opening for despair, for we know a great deal *about* them.

We know there are twelve—*thirteen* if we count the unlucky few, who never get to see the other side of their Awakening.

We know their occurrence rates across every census the UHF has conducted in over four centuries.

We know their Polarity pairings, their cannibalization behaviours at uneven energy levels, their colour signatures as they manifest through a Gate.

We know that two of them—Nihilus and Fames—more than any others, reshape the personality of their bearer over time in ways the other ten do not, and we know this well enough that it informs psychiatric screening protocols across every branch of the military.

And we know when they are assigned.

This is, perhaps, the most remarkable thing we *believe* to know.

The Inheritance is not given during the Awakening, when the Psyker first perceives their Gate. It is not given at Integration, when the Allbright System first touches a person. It is not, as some so-called scholars *still* insist, despite all evidence of the contrary, given at the first breath.

It is set the moment the Soul returns, cleansed, from the Maelstrom—before the person it will belong to exists in any form whatsoever.

Before conception. Before their parents have met, in most cases. Before the very idea of their existence is even once breathed into our galaxy.

The Soul comes back from that place *already* carrying its Inheritance, the way a coin comes from the mint already carrying its face. At birth then, the Soul attaches to the body—and the person, unknowing thereof, is *already* spoken for.

They will carry it undetected for their entire life, barring two exceptions: The rare violence of a Repression Event producing a Wielder and the subsequent, deliberate experimentation to produce an educated guess; or the exceptional dangers of the Awakening itself—if an Awakening ever comes at all.

Most people, however, carry their Inheritance to the grave without ever once touching it—a lens, ground, polished and fitted, through which no light is ever shone...

Which brings us to the question that has consumed this symposium for four hundred and twelve consecutive years.

Why?

We understand, functionally, *what* an Inheritance does.

The Paths, as best we can determine, are the fundamental laws of the Void and of Reality itself—the deep grammar of what is possible.

Fire, and the many things fire means. Gravity, and the many things gravity means. Augury, and the many things augury means...

The Paths are the *laws*.

The Inheritance is the lens through which a given Soul is permitted to read them.

Two Psykers on the same Path, bearing different Inheritances, are not using the same Power differently—not fundamentally, at least. Their Intent and Will might be directly aligned, with the only difference being the lens they're channeled through.

They are, in some sense that our understanding gestures at but cannot fully hold, using wholly different Powers that merely appear to share a name, when one observes their outcomes side by side.

Which raises an uncomfortable structural question: Can a law truly be called a law, when it is inherently mutable by the one interpreting it?

Is a Power channeled through the lens of Truth genuinely the *same* exact Power as one channeled through its antithesis of Deception, when the outcomes are so vastly different?

This line of thinking leads us to some of the major questions of our field. Ones we have asked many times before, and will once again ask and discuss at this very Symposium:

Why should the laws require lenses at all? And why should a Soul be fitted with one before it is even a person? Or be fitted with one at all?

On this, naturally, we have varying schools of thought.

Let me be even-handed in my disservice to all of them.

The ***Multiplicity school*** holds that the Inheritances are simply the natural facets of each law—that no fundamental principle expresses itself singularly, and the twelve main Inheritances are the twelve ways any law *can* be read, the way a single word carries different meanings in different mouths.

Under this reading, the Inheritance is no more mysterious than grammar.

It is an elegant school of thought. It is a tidy school of thought. And it explains, in my estimation, nothing about *why* the assignment happens in the Maelstrom, of all places.

The **Sacrosanct school** holds that the Inheritances are components of a design—that their distribution is not statistical noise but architecture, and that humanity has simply not yet perceived the structure it is being fitted into.

Adherents point to the eerie stability of the occurrence rates across centuries and across populations that have had no contact with one another.

I confess the numbers trouble me too, for distributions that *stable* are not, in my experience, mere accidents. But a design naturally requires a designer, and on that subject the Sacrosanct school falls conspicuously silent.

The **Factional school**—fashionable among younger scholars, and I understand why—draws the analogy to our own Galactic War: Humanity, they observe, has sorted itself into great Factions, each a banner for an ideal.

Why should the Void be different? Under this reading, the Inheritances are the banners of the Void's own denizens—twelve ideals, or twelve powers, or twelve *somethings*, whose rivalries and alignments we perceive only as the colours bleeding through our Gates.

Every Soul returning from the Maelstrom is, in this telling, *conscripted*. Stamped with an allegiance to a conflict it will never see, on behalf of a party it will never meet.

I personally find this school the most disquieting of them all—and for precisely that reason, I give it the greatest weight in my own deliberations.

Call it a scholar's failing, if you like.

But I have found, across a long career, that comfort has rarely been a property of true things.

The ideas that unsettle and disquiet us most are seldom wrong merely because we wish them to be. And so I have made it my practice to weigh the least comforting explanations the highest—not because discomfort *proves* truth, but because our instinct to look away from them proves nothing at all...

And yet there are smaller camps still.

The **Resonance school** proposes that the Inheritance is not assigned but *acquired*—that the Maelstrom's cleansing is not a washing but a tempering, and each Soul emerges bearing the mark of whatever it endured there, the way steel bears the mark of its quenching.

Under this reading, your Inheritance is a *scar*.

A record of something that happened to you before you were you.

And there is the **Mirror school**, smallest and newest of all, which I mention only for completeness and because its very founder was my own mentor.

It holds that the Inheritance is not applied *to* the Soul at all.

It holds that the Inheritance is what the Soul *is*—that the twelve are not lenses fitted over some neutral substrate, but the twelve kinds of thing a Soul can *fundamentally be*, and that everything else we call a person is merely weather moving across that fixed terrain.

My mentor believed this until the day she died.

I have never been able to decide whether it is the most profound position in our field or the most circular... Possibly it is both.

Friends. Colleagues. Academic rivals.

I will close with the observation I open every symposium with, because in four hundred and twelve years no one has managed to unseat it:

Every one of these schools is a theory about intent, constructed by creatures who cannot verify that intent even exists.

We are reading the face of the coin and arguing about the mind of the mint.

The Void does not correct us. The Maelstrom does not publish hypotheses. The Souls come back stamped, attach themselves, sleep, and sometimes wake—and the only honest sentence in our entire field remains the one I began with:

We do not know what an Inheritance is.

We know only that, before any of us drew breath, it was decided that we would be permitted to see through them.

Now... Go out and discuss among each other, for that we might find an answer to the everstanding questions.

Enjoy the symposium.

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