

Volume 2 - Chapter 11 - Inheritance V

The ominous silence lingered between them for only a few moments before the Rune priest's demeanor shifted 180 degrees yet again, snapping back into his usual lecture mode as if the prior conversation had never even happened.

"Luckily for all of us," he continued, tone now once again *far* more casual, "*Fames* is the third least-common Inheritance in existence, only outranked by *Mutatio*—which we've already covered—and *Creatio* itself."

His fingers tapped lightly against the *Deep Amber* gem on the hovering Inheritance Polarity Star, emphasizing his point.

"Only about 5.86% of all Psykers inherit *Fames*, which means the potential danger it carries is fairly easy to mitigate. As long as the Psyker is properly educated on what their Inheritance actually does, and how it affects them, we can usually keep them from succumbing to the... *less desirable* aspects of their Inheritance before it really starts influencing their personality overmuch."

Thea exhaled slightly, relieved that *Fames* Psykers were rare enough to not be a widespread concern. But the way he phrased it—the idea that they had to be warned before their own Inheritance changed them—still sent a chill down her spine.

The Rune priest must have noticed the slight tension in her posture, because he raised both hands in a disarming gesture, his smirk returning.

"As for your *own* Inheritance, Thea," he said, "which you are undoubtedly feeling a little wary of right now—don't worry."

She blinked, surprised at the Rune priest's ability to read her thoughts so easily.

"Much like the vast majority of Inheritances—except for *Fames* and *Nihilus*—*Veritas* does not influence your personality in any significant way," he reassured her. "And not before you've unlocked your Presence anyway, so you've got a long way to go before you even have to think about it."

His eyes twinkled slightly with amusement as he leaned in just a bit, lowering his voice conspiratorially.

"Not that a *Veritas* personality is *particularly* problematic to begin with, of course."

He gave her a playful wink. "Nothing wrong with a person who's just a little more inclined to speak the truth, now is there?"

Thea wasn't quite sure how to take the knowledge that her own personality might end up shaped by something as intangible as her Inheritance. It felt strange, *unsettling* even—but she also couldn't deny that the Rune priest's nonchalant attitude toward it helped soften the blow markedly.

After all, with how old and powerful the Rune priest was, his Inheritance had undoubtedly affected his personality to some larger degree by now—and while he was a bit chaotic and definitely eccentric, Thea couldn't exactly find anything inherently *wrong* with his behavior as a whole.

'There really isn't anything inherently wrong about being more inclined to tell the truth,' she thought, slowly nodding to herself as she tried to mentally run through various scenarios where this might affect her in the future. *'And the Rune priest **did** say it's not a compulsion-type thing either. If I really need to keep something a secret, I still can... right?'*

She was brought back to the present moment when she saw the Rune priest extend his right hand, palm up, mirroring the stance he had used for all the previous Fireballs.

Not wanting to miss any detail of the next Inheritance's demonstration, Thea focused intently on the space just above his palm, expecting a new variation of the Power to take shape.

But the moment she did, a strange pressure settled behind her eyes.

Her breath hitched. She *recognized* this sensation.

It was *more* than familiar by now.

Without hesitation, she instinctively pushed more Energy into her [Eyes of the Void], honing her focus as she had countless times before.

Something *gave way*.

And then—

A sphere of deep purple flame appeared in the Rune priest's hand, as if it had been there the *entire time*.

Thea blinked.

The Rune priest did the same.

Then he let out a small, amused chuckle. "Huh... Well..."

His eyebrows lifted briefly in surprise before settling into something closer to knowing amusement. "I wasn't expecting you to just *immediately* go for the kill-shot without even asking me... But I guess that's ultimately on me; I *did* read your profile, after all..."

He trailed off, his tone suggesting there was something in particular he found thoroughly amusing about this moment.

Thea, however, was *thoroughly* lost.

'Kill-shot...? What did I do...?'

Before she could ask, the Rune priest glanced toward the air and issued a command, “Sovereign, increase the stealth component of the *Obscuritas* Fireball to the equivalent of a Tier 3 generator.”

“Affirmative,” came the AI’s ever-measured response.

In the next moment, the purple Fireball *vanished*.

It wasn’t like the way a normal fire would flicker and die, nor even the eerie dissipation of some of the other Inheritances she had seen.

It was as if the *entire concept* of its existence had been erased from her perception.

If she hadn’t *just* seen it a moment ago, she wouldn’t have even known to look for it.

The Rune priest turned back to her.

“I didn’t intend for you to break through the stealth here, Thea. This wasn’t a test,” he said, though there was not a hint of anger in his tone. “That one’s on me, honestly, but let’s try to rein in the competitiveness when it comes to these illusions—unless I *specifically* tell you otherwise, alright? They’re fairly costly to generate and maintain, both for the Sovereign *and* for me.”

Thea’s stomach dropped as she realized what he was saying.

She had *accidentally* brute-forced her way through an illusion that wasn’t *meant* to be broken, simply on instinct from doing so for the past month non-stop as a way to keep herself alive.

Her face heated at the realization.

She lowered her head, immediately preparing to apologize—

Smack.

The sharp *thump* of a karate chop landed cleanly on the top of her head.

Her hands shot up to clutch at the spot, her head snapping back up in a mix of shock and indignation as she met the Rune priest’s completely unapologetic stare.

‘Did he—Did he just fucking chop me?!’

The Rune priest withdrew his hand with casual ease, but his eyes told a different story.

There was no playfulness in them now—only a sharp focus.

They were locked onto hers with an intensity that made her instinctively straighten in her seat.

“I was *apologizing* to you, Thea, because of an oversight *I* made. *Not* chiding you for your actions,” he said, his voice slow and deliberate, as if he were speaking to someone he fully

expected to misunderstand him. “You do *not* apologize for things that are *my* mistake. You simply acknowledge the way forward, *at most*.”

His eyes didn’t waver, as he asked, “Are we *clear* on this?”

There was no anger in his voice, no raised tone—but the sheer level of intent behind his words settled over her like an anvil; this was clearly important to him.

Thea’s thoughts churned as she processed his words, an, unfortunately, all-too-familiar confusion creeping in.

*‘This is the **second** time he’s phrased it like this...’*

Hadn’t she *just* made a mistake? She had broken the illusion without waiting for an order to do so. She had gone against the intended flow of the lesson, forcing the Rune priest to adjust the demonstration on the fly.

That was *definitely* a failure on her part, wasn’t it?

Then why was he saying—again—that he *wasn’t* chiding her? If she hadn’t met his expectations, then surely that *was* something to be reprimanded for.

That was just *how things worked*.

So why was the Rune priest acting like it wasn’t a failure of hers at all? That it was somehow his own mistake, rather than the person’s that actively caused the issue?

She clenched her jaw slightly, unable to fully wrap her mind around it. But she also realised that she couldn’t stew over this for any length of time, the Rune priest wouldn’t be patient forever with her.

‘Fine. I’ll figure it out later,’ she thought to herself, making a snap-decision on the matter.

The plan wasn’t all too hard to concoct either: Corvus was already the de-facto social expert of Alpha Squad—if *anyone* could make sense of this weird dynamic, it would be him.

She would simply ask him about it at the first opportunity.

But for now, she simply inclined her head in a respectful nod, signaling her understanding.

Even though she *didn’t* understand.

The Rune priest let out a heavy sigh, clearly not convinced.

But rather than push the matter further, he turned back into his usual lecturing mode. With a small gesture, he directed Thea’s attention to the now-hidden Fireball resting in his palm.

“Right,” he said, the weight in his voice lifting as if the previous conversation had already been filed away. “Tell me what you perceive; *without* breaking the illusion.”

Thea exhaled slowly, pushing aside the lingering confusion from their exchange.

There would be time to figure *that* out later. For now, she had a task.

Her eyes locked onto the space where she *knew* the fireball rested, hovering just above the Rune priest's palm. She focused intently, scanning the air for any flicker, any shimmer, any minute distortion that might give it away.

Nothing.

She shifted her perspective, adjusting the angle from which she looked, tilting her head slightly as if a different viewing angle might reveal something. When that failed, she took it a step further—rising from her seat and circling the Rune priest, keeping her eyes fixed on his hand as she moved.

Still nothing.

No distortion. No refraction. No telltale shimmer of light bending unnaturally around an object.

The space above his palm looked completely, utterly *empty*.

Her fingers twitched at her sides as unease started to settle in.

The Rune priest had chosen his words carefully—he hadn't asked her to *see* the fireball. He had asked her to *perceive* it.

It wasn't just about sight.

'Alright then...'

She closed her eyes.

Her hearing sharpened as she tuned into the sounds around her, filtering out the background hum of the training hall. She could hear the subtle shifting of the Rune priest's robes as he breathed, the faint rustling of leaves around them, even the slow, steady *thump-thump* of his heartbeat—so impossibly calm and rhythmic that it almost seemed unnatural.

But the fireball?

Nothing.

No crackle of flames. No flickering embers. No faint shift of air from the heat it should have been producing.

It was as if it simply *did not exist*.

She shifted focus again, this time testing her sense of smell. Even without enhanced olfactory abilities, she should have been able to catch *something*—a hint of burning air, the scent of heated particles, *literally anything*.

But once again, there was *nothing*.

Her fingers clenched slightly as the realization settled in, a slow, creeping dread unfurling in her stomach.

She *knew* it was there. She had *seen* it before the Rune priest had upgraded its stealth properties. But now? Now, it might as well have been a complete fabrication.

Even with her high levels of Perception—enough to pick up on the faintest sounds, enough to detect micro-expressions on a person's face from across a room—she couldn't even *begin* to sense the fireball.

It wasn't just hidden from sight.

It was hidden from *everything*.

Thea sat back down, still somewhat refusing to accept that it was completely untraceable.

"I can't tell it exists. At all," she admitted reluctantly. "No smell, no sound, no visual distortions like stealth tech or illusion generators sometimes leave behind... Nothing. If I hadn't seen it earlier, I wouldn't even know it was there."

Her frown deepened as she studied the empty space above the Rune priest's palm once more, as if sheer persistence alone could force the fireball to reveal itself.

"The only thing I didn't test was touching it," she added after a beat, a dry edge to her tone. "But given what the previous Fireballs did, I *really* didn't want to try that."

The Rune priest chuckled, a low, genuinely amused sound. His eyes crinkled slightly in clear approval.

"Good. *Very* good," he praised. "Yes, it is *particularly* wise not to touch a Fireball Power, as it will almost inevitably blow up in your face—even if you can't perceive it."

His tone was light, but the warning behind his words was clear.

Then, with a casual flick of his left hand, he gestured toward the distant targets.

"The reason I wanted you to investigate the Fireball so thoroughly," he continued, "will *hopefully* become apparent with the demonstration. So, pay close attention, my dear pupil."

Thea inhaled slowly, instinctively tensing as she braced herself for *whatever* was about to happen next.

Something about these demonstrations always set her on edge.

It wasn't the power on display—it was the sheer *wrongness* of it all.

Every Inheritance so far had warped reality in ways that felt thoroughly unnatural, as if rewriting the very rules of existence to suit its own whims.

The way the *Perditio* Fireball had obliterated everything in an instant. The way the *Discordia* flames had flowed like liquid and bent logic itself. The horrific transformation caused by *Mutatio*, twisting life into grotesque mockeries of itself. And *Fames*...

She swallowed.

There was something *deeply* disturbing about watching the universe *bend* to an Inheritance's will.

It wasn't *magic*. It wasn't some secret, special technology gone awry.

It was something *older*—something more *fundamental*.

And every time she watched one of these Fireballs do its work, that primal, instinctive part of her being screamed that *this was not supposed to exist*.

Yet here she was. Watching. *Learning*.

And waiting for *Obscuritas* to show her just how much more terrifying the Psyker world could get.

As if he had been waiting for her to fully settle in, the Rune priest gently nudged his right palm forward, like he had done all the other Fireballs before. Thea's entire body was taut with anticipation, her senses stretched to their limits, trying to catch something—*anything*—of what the *Obscuritas* Fireball was about to do.

She expected *something*—perhaps a ripple in the air where it exploded, followed by flames suddenly appearing out of nowhere, their presence revealed only after the fact.

But instead... There was once again *nothing*.

No explosion. No burst of flame. No sound. Not even the smell of burning ozone, that always came alongside the previous Fireball's initial explosions.

And yet, the clearing in front of her *changed*.

Thea's breath caught as she watched the first tree abruptly *topple*, its trunk snapping and breaking with no visible damage—no char, no scorch marks, no hint of *why* it had fallen at all.

Then, a split second later, one of the armored targets simply *collapsed*.

Like a puppet with its strings cut, the figure crumpled to the ground, utterly lifeless.

Her pulse spiked.

Another target dropped.

Then another.

Then *two more at once*.

Her brain was trying to *rationalize* what she was seeing—but nothing about this was rational at all. She knew that the Fireball was causing it, but she had no understanding of what it was actually *doing* to cause all of the things she was seeing.

Immediately after, the remaining targets fell one by one, in eerie silence, each slumping into an unnatural heap where they stood.

No flailing. No last-second struggles. No screaming.

Just gone as if somebody had plugged their power cords.

And the trees—The trees *kept falling*.

One after another, they tilted, creaked, and *collapsed* like they had simply... given up. Like they had unilaterally *chosen* to lie down and die.

And still—there was *nothing*.

No visible sign of an impact, no raging inferno, no devastation.

Just the tranquil clearing in the middle of the simulated forest, with some odd bodies on the floor and broken trees that looked like they had fallen over from a stiff breeze.

But then, roughly five seconds after the Rune priest's simple, casual motion had nudged the invisible Fireball toward its victims—*Reality corrected itself*.

Thea's eyes widened in pure horror as the scene before her transformed in an instant.

One moment, it was an eerily untouched clearing, full of fallen bodies and collapsed trees.

The next—It was *hell*.

Flames appeared *everywhere* at once.

The toppled trees that had seemed intact only a breath ago were suddenly *charred* husks, their trunks blackened, their bark eaten away by roaring, unnatural fire. The ground, once seemingly undisturbed, was now scorched beyond recognition, deep cracks running through the soil as if the land itself had been seared open.

And the targets—

The armored soldiers who had dropped so suddenly—

They were *burning and melting*.

Their forms were grotesquely twisted, armor warped and melted around their bodies, fused to the flesh beneath. What little of them was visible through the scorched gaps in their plating was unrecognizable, their flesh charred, blackened, *gone*.

Thea barely had time to process the sheer wrongness of it before the smell hit her.

Burning flesh. Scorched earth. Ozone, thick and acrid, filling her lungs like smoke.

Her stomach twisted violently, nausea creeping up her throat, but she *couldn't* look away.

The realization settled in her chest like a crushing weight, suffocating in its sheer, awful clarity: The Obscuritas Fireball had done everything the other Fireballs had as well.

It had destroyed, incinerated, erased life just as brutally, just as thoroughly.

But for those first five seconds—It had *lied* about it.

No warning. No indication. No chance to react.

And even *worse*—

“They... They didn’t even know they were burning alive, did they...?” Thea’s voice was barely more than a whisper, her throat tight, hoarse with horror.

It was *one thing* to be vaporized by a *Perditio* Fireball—gone in an instant, reduced to nothing before the pain could even register. It was *one thing* to be crushed and molten alive by *Discordia*’s warped, liquid fire, or to be twisted and reshaped into something monstrous by *Mutatio*’s cursed touch.

Even *Fames*, for all its sheer *relentlessness*, still gave its victims a *chance* to see their deaths coming.

But *Obscuritas*? You wouldn’t even know.

You wouldn’t *feel* the heat as it melted your flesh. Wouldn’t hear your own armor *warping* as it fused to your skin. Wouldn’t smell the sickly, acrid stench of your own body *burning*.

You wouldn’t even *realize* your lungs had long been charred beyond repair, that your vision had already failed because your eyes had already burst from the invisible flames licking over them with ravenous glee.

At some point, you would simply... *fall*. And *never* get back up.

Not knowing why. Not knowing how.

Not until *Obscuritas* deemed that it was time for the *Truth* to be seen once more.

“Indeed,” the Rune priest answered, a note of pride threading through his voice. It caught Thea off guard—*pride* was not what she had expected after witnessing such sheer horror.

“I’m glad to see you picked up on that fact right away,” he continued, nodding in approval. “Usually, that’s something I have to *explicitly* point out afterward. Well done, dear pupil.”

Still shaken, Thea finally managed to tear her gaze away from the scorched, corpse-littered clearing and meet the Rune priest’s eyes. To her surprise, he looked *pleased*—utterly content with the results of the demonstration.

Then, just like that, his tone shifted back into the easy, almost conversational cadence of his usual lectures.

“What you just saw was *Obscuritas* when applied to a simple offensive Power like Fireball.” He gestured to the ashen wasteland before them as if presenting nothing more than a training exercise. “*Obscuritas* fully conceals the *Truth* of the world, deceiving even your own senses as you burn alive.”

He raised a hand and pointed toward the Inheritance Star hovering between them, singling out the purple gem at the 5-o’clock position. “*Obscuritas*, universally represented by the color *Deep Purple*, is the tenth Inheritance you will encounter during your Delves. It governs the fundamental nature of the Void to obscure, hide, and lie about the Truth.

“Most *Obscuritas* Psykers specialize in illusions, assassination, or battlefield disruption—supporting ambush tactics, disorienting their enemies, and making sure you never know what is real... But, as you just saw, they are also utterly terrifying when they turn their Inheritance toward direct harm instead.”

Thea swallowed thickly, that last point settling heavily in her chest.

This was the very Inheritance she had gone up against in the Assessment. *This* was why her [Eyes of the Void] had failed. *This* was what had led to her death.

The Rune priest’s voice cut through the thoughts clawing their way into her mind.

“It is the *Polarity* to your own Inheritance, *Veritas*—which we have already discussed. Where *Veritas reveals* the truth, *Obscuritas hides* it. Where *Veritas removes* obstructions to lay bare what the Void perceives, *Obscuritas puts those very obstructions into place*.”

His gaze flickered back to her.

“*Obscuritas* Psykers make up approximately 9.86% of all Psykers,” he added, “which is almost *twice* as many as those who share your own Inheritance, Thea.”

Her stomach clenched.

‘Almost twice as many?!’ A twinge of panic twisted inside her chest. *‘I have double the chance to run into an Obscuritas than another Veritas?!’*

As if sensing her unease, the Rune priest’s expression softened ever so slightly.

“But don’t be *too* afraid of this *Polarity*, Thea,” he reassured, “because always remember: *Polarities go both ways*. And *Veritas*, being the more focused and less universally flexible of the two, has a clear power advantage over *Obscuritas*. In almost *all* circumstances, a *Veritas* Psyker will beat an *Obscuritas* in a head-to-head—so long as both parties act to the best of their abilities.”

Much to her surprise, his demeanor turned mischievous.

He leaned in just slightly, lowering his voice as though sharing some grand secret.

“And at the end of the day...” he murmured, “who should *really* be more afraid?

“The many who *hide*...

“Or the few who hunt them down to *reveal* them?”

Thea blinked at that, processing his words slowly.

Then, despite the lingering unease in her chest, she *smirked*.

It was a subtle shift—small, almost hesitant—but perfectly *genuine*.

Because the image his words painted—the idea of *Obscuritas* Psykers huddled in alleyways, lurking in corners, desperately trying to *avoid her*—was thoroughly amusing.

The Rune priest, seemingly satisfied with her reaction, straightened and returned to his usual composed demeanor.

“We’ll go into more detail on how this interplay works when we reach your own Inheritance at the *very end* of this,” he stated matter-of-factly.

Then, lifting his hand once more, he gestured toward the *Luminous White* gem at the 11-o’clock position—directly opposite the *Deep Purple* one they had just covered.

“For now, I think it’s best to continue with the next one in line,” the Rune priest said, his voice carrying a weight that hadn’t been there before. “Especially because this one is very... *special*, to say the least.”

Thea’s eyes snapped to the dark blue gem at the very bottom of the Inheritance Star—directly opposite the *Crimson Red of Perditio*.

‘*Special...?*’ She thought, anticipation curling in her chest. ‘*This is the first time he’s called any of them particularly **special**, aside from Fames’ and Nihilus’ unique effects on personality...*’

As if following her train of thought, the Rune priest tapped the dark blue gem lightly, his fingers lingering over its smooth surface. “Located at the 6-o’clock position, and representing the *Polarity to Perditio*, we have the *king* among *all* Inheritances. The *one* Inheritance that all other Psykers, no matter their pride or gained power, envy and wish they had instead of whatever the Void had decided they get: *Creatio*.”

His voice took on an almost begrudging edge, just barely tinged with something *sour*.

“It is, by far, the *rarest* Inheritance, appearing in only 3.25% of all Psykers—nearly *twice* as rare as the second-rarest one. But it is also the *most versatile*, the *most powerful*, and the most... *fantastical* of them all.”

His eyes met hers.

“It is universally represented by the color *Night Blue*, and as the name suggests, it governs the *very power of Creation itself*. A *Creatio* Psyker is the closest thing to one of the gods of

old humanity, for they possess the capability to *shape* reality, even to bring entirely new things into existence; to *create*.”

Thea’s breath caught. Her thoughts tripped over themselves, tumbling into a disorganized mess as she tried to grasp the sheer magnitude of what he had just said.

‘Fantastical? The power of the gods of old? Reshaping and creating reality itself?!’

It felt impossible. Utterly unreal.

Like something out of one of the *Golden Age Arcade*’s most absurd high-fantasy games.

“I think the easiest way to truly understand the difference between *Creatio* and all other Inheritances,” the Rune priest continued, the weight in his voice keeping her grounded, “is to demonstrate it.”

As he spoke, he lifted his right hand—his palm facing upward, fingers slightly curled.

Thea instinctively tensed, anticipation practically thrumming in her veins.

‘What kind of Fireball is this going to be?!’

Her mind raced to imagine it.

Would it be some divine, ethereal flame, one that *built* instead of *destroyed*? Would it manifest in a way that made no logical sense, rewriting the very *rules* of existence as it burned?

But... no Fireball formed at all.

Instead, the Rune priest *painfully slowly* brought his thumb and middle finger together. His movements were deliberate, his eyes locked onto hers for just a second before he gave a small, knowing nod toward the freshly reset clearing.

Thea’s gaze flicked toward the empty space.

And then...

Snap.

The sound of his fingers snapping together echoed through the clearing—

—but only for the briefest instant.

Because in the very next moment, it was completely drowned out.

A thunderous cascade of explosions erupted all at once as more than a dozen Fireballs simply winked into existence across the battlefield.

There was no warning. No flickering buildup. No moment for them to manifest.

One second, the clearing was *untouched*.

The next—Fire.

Fire and explosions *everywhere*.

Thea's mouth hung open as she watched it all unfold.

She barely had time to process what had happened before the full reality of the *Creatio* Fireball hit her like a warhead straight to the chest.

These Fireballs hadn't *traveled*. They hadn't *been launched*.

They had simply... *appeared*.

Dead-center in the middle of the target area.

Two meters above the target area, suspended in the air before they *detonated* in an eruption of searing flames. *Inside* the earth below the target area, blowing apart the hardened dirt and rock with a fiery explosion that sent molten debris raining in every direction, burning and scorching everything it touched.

But none of that was what caught Thea's attention.

None of that was what made her stomach churn with sheer, visceral *terror*.

Her eyes locked onto the targets—onto what had been the Stellar Republic Soldiers merely an instant ago.

The Fireballs had *simply appeared inside of them*.

They didn't strike them. Didn't hit them. Didn't impact their armor before exploding.

No. The infernal spheres of fire had manifested *within* their very bodies.

And in the next instant, they had already *detonated*.

There was no time for the targets to react. No chance to evade, no moment to comprehend their fate, no instinctive attempt to shield themselves.

One moment, they stood.

The next—They were simply *gone*.

The explosions had ripped through them from the inside out, evaporating flesh, pulverizing bones, and obliterating everything they were before their nervous systems even had a chance to process pain.

Armor plates had burst apart as superheated gasses had expanded outward, sending molten shards flying.

Some of the heavier-armored Soldiers barely even moved before their insides were flash-incinerated, their remains collapsing into smoldering husks inside empty shells of armor.

It was so brutally *instantaneous* that Thea wasn't sure what unsettled her more—the sheer efficiency of it...

...or the terrifying truth that *nothing* could have saved them.

There was *no* counterplay.

No dodging.

No preemptive action.

No last-second barrier, shield, or sprinting dive that could have *possibly* saved their lives.

The Fireballs had simply sprung into *existence where they were*.

And in that instant—so had *death*...