

## **Volume 2 - Chapter 15 - Awakening**

The Rune priest's voice finally broke Thea's morbid fascination, managing to pull her attention away from the devastation before her.

"And *that* is what a fireball power would look like when used through your *Veritas* lens, Thea," he said, gesturing toward the scorched wasteland that had once been the target area.

"It creates a perfect sphere of practically infinite reactive energy. Upon contact, the power delivers precisely enough reactive energy to trigger a redox reaction in whatever material it touches." He let that sink in for a moment before adding, "However, as you might imagine, this comes with some *serious* limitations."

He lifted a single finger.

"First," he said, "*Veritas* does not alter the nature of reality. It doesn't impose its own rules or create reactions that shouldn't exist. It merely reveals the fundamental truth of things—it does not change said truth in any way."

He gestured back toward the battlefield. "That means if a redox reaction is not possible—if the material you hit doesn't have a reaction point—then the *veritas* fire won't do anything at all. It won't simply combust things that aren't capable of combustion. It requires the inherent chemical potential to react in the first place."

A second finger went up.

"Second, and technically part of the first—if the surrounding environment isn't conducive to combustion, the reaction won't happen."

He flicked his hand, and the image on the conjured screen between them shifted, displaying a simplified breakdown of a redox reaction.

"A redox reaction requires both a reactive material and an oxidizer. In almost every normal case, that oxidizer will be oxygen from the air in the environment—which means you can expect *Veritas* fire to work in most scenarios you'll find yourself in." He smirked slightly. "I doubt you'll be in many pure nitrogen, helium, or exotic gas environments, but if you *were*—and there was no oxygen available—the reaction would fail entirely."

His expression turned serious again.

"That *also* means, however, that if a specific material requires an oxidizer other than oxygen, *Veritas* fire will once again do nothing. If a reaction *needs* chlorine, fluorine, or something else entirely—then no combustion will occur, as there will be no viable redox reaction point the material could be brought to."

He lowered his hand and gave her a pointed look.

"*Veritas* isn't like other inheritances—it won't *force* things to happen. It doesn't provide you with workarounds. If the conditions aren't right, your power simply won't work."

A third finger went up. “Third and lastly for now, the logical conclusion of all this: You can’t combust something without a redox reaction. That means, especially in a vacuum, your *Veritas* Fireball will be completely useless.”

He let that statement settle before continuing. “Where *Aurae* Fireballs, as a counter-example, can exist without issue—since they do not burn in the literal sense and don’t need oxygen or any other reactant—the *Veritas* Fireball does. It *requires* oxygen, or another oxidizer, for the redox reaction to occur. No oxidizer, no reaction, no combustion. There are a few rare exceptions to this, but as a general rule of thumb, assume that if combustion isn’t chemically possible, *Veritas* fire won’t work.”

With a snap of his fingers, the entire scene shifted.

The scorched battlefield, the smoldering trees, the devastated ground—all of it vanished.

The once-dense forest, where they had been sitting for the past hours, began to dissolve, step by step, until nothing remained.

Thea’s stomach twisted.

A sudden, brief sense of vertigo hit her as her mind scrambled to catch up. She had completely forgotten that they weren’t actually on a planet, weren’t sitting in a real forest at all. The DDS’s simulated environment had been so immersive that for a moment, she had genuinely believed they were planetside.

She exhaled slowly, steadying herself as the metallic walls of the training chamber came into focus around her once again.

But the Rune priest’s words were still turning over in her head.

*‘I definitely need to get those chemistry and physics Skill classes out of the way immediately...’*

If every single power she used would manifest like this—bound by the raw, unforgiving logic of the *Veritas* Inheritance—then there was no avoiding it. She would have to study.

A lot.

*‘Not that I really mind,’* she thought, a small, almost relieved breath escaping her. *‘Proper teachers and real studying were nearly impossible to get on Lumiosia, despite James’ best efforts. So at least here, I’ll finally be able to learn properly.’*

That was definitely something to look forward to.

“Now,” the Rune priest continued, rising from his chair with a smooth motion, gesturing for her to stay seated, “you might be asking yourself: *Why did he tell me all of this when I don’t even have a Fireball Power?*”

He offered a small, knowing smile. “The answer is quite simple: Because fire is one of the most fundamental things we, as humans, understand.”

He began pacing slowly in front of her as he continued, “Fire is the very first thing humanity ever wielded and controlled. It’s the foundation of civilization and the first force we ever bent to our will. We understand it more intimately than anything else in the universe. As a species, we grew up alongside it, shaped by it, using it in every way imaginable. It’s so deeply ingrained into our existence that we don’t just understand it intellectually—it’s woven into our instincts. Where most animals fear fire, we... we are *curious* about it instead.”

A quiet chuckle escaped him. “Usually ending with children trying to touch the flames and burning themselves—but hey, at least they’re trying to figure things out, huh?”

Shaking his head in amusement, he continued.

“Ultimately, the point of the *Veritas* Fireball example isn’t to teach you about fire. It’s to teach you about *Veritas*.” His pacing slowed. “Just as *Veritas* completely alters the behavior of fire, the very thing we know how it operates on an instinctual level, it also alters the behavior of almost every other Power you could ever gain access to. That’s why, as a *Veritas* Psyker, you will always need to ask yourself a single, critical question: ‘*What is the fundamental nature of this thing?*’”

His footsteps halted as he suddenly turned, pointing directly at her.

His previous flamboyant energy had returned, seemingly left behind in the solemnity of the forest setting.

“Pop quiz time!” His grin widened. “What’s the fundamental nature of lightning? Or earth? Sure, those are elemental Paths, but let’s get freaky with it. What about gravity? What’s its fundamental nature? Or magnetism? They’re all Paths available to you as a Psyker—but would you really understand how any of them would manifest under *Veritas*?”

Thea immediately shook her head.

There was absolutely no chance she had any idea about any of that.

She knew the bare-bones basics—gravity pulled things together, magnetism had to do with charged particles, lightning was formed by electrical discharges in the atmosphere, and earth... Well, that was just rocks and soil, right?

But the *fundamental nature* of those things?

What were they, at their core? She had absolutely no clue.

“I would not,” she admitted, shaking her head again. “Is that even possible to know, though...? Are all *Veritas* Psykers basically professors in every aspect of natural science?”

The Rune priest chuckled. “No, of course not. But they *do* tend to focus on one area in particular. Whatever Path speaks to you the most will be the one you naturally start researching and learning about the most. A Fire-Path *Veritas* Psyker would likely dive deep

into chemistry-based Skills, while one with a Gravity-Path would prioritize physics. The initial shotgun approach of gathering all the foundational Skills works for basic and advanced Skill classes, but beyond that? It would be far too much to ask any single person to develop a genius-level understanding of every natural science.”

*‘I bet Kara could do it,’* Thea immediately thought.

There was no doubt in her mind.

If Karania had been the *Veritas* Psyker instead of her, she would have already been leagues ahead. She wouldn’t have needed to be told to study—she would have done it instinctively, just for the fun of it.

Thea clenched her jaw slightly. She had a lot of catching up to do if she wanted to keep pace with her friend.

Right now, she had an edge—her *Wielder*-related benefits set her apart, letting her climb the leaderboards with relative ease.

But that wouldn’t last.

As the year progressed—especially once everyone reached Tier 1, or even Tier 1 Prime—more Recruits, or then Privates, would inevitably unlock their Psyker potential. Right now, she stood at the top by virtue of her early advantage... but once the playing field leveled, that would no longer be enough.

If she didn’t actively work to build up a massive lead in knowledge and experience, then sooner or later, she’d lose that #1 spot.

*‘Can’t coast on my inherent benefits forever...’*

Her thoughts were abruptly cut off as the Rune priest continued, completely unfazed by her moment of internal reflection.

“Now, that said, I think it’s time we delve into Powers, Paths, and everything related to them. As mentioned—”

He stopped mid-sentence.

His expression flattened into something unreadable as his head tilted ever so slightly, like he was listening for something.

Thea was on high alert in an instant. She pushed off from her chair, her body shifting into a ready stance as her precognition flared—

But... nothing.

No sense of incoming danger. No flickers of threat or impending harm.

Still, her gaze darted around the room, scanning for anything off.

Before she could get far, the Rune priest lifted a hand—an easy, deliberate motion, palm outward. A silent signal.

*“Don’t worry.”*

Thea froze, tension coiled in her muscles. She didn’t lower her guard.

But she waited, trusting that the Rune priest would know what’s going on.

A short moment later, the Rune priest let out a heavy sigh, shaking his head slightly before responding to some unseen presence. “Very well, let them know I will be there in... thirty minutes.”

His voice carried a tinge of reluctance, as if he’d rather be anywhere but that meeting.

He turned back to Thea, his expression softening into an apologetic smile. “Sorry about that, my dearest pupil. The Sovereign just informed me that I’m required for an important meeting, so I’ll have to cut today’s session short. As much as I hate to leave you without answers to some of the more nuanced topics, we will continue our sessions throughout the year whenever possible.”

Thea’s heart sank.

The flood of information had been overwhelming, a relentless barrage of explanations about the Inheritances and their strange, often counterintuitive interactions with even a single Power. But at least it had been *something*.

Answers.

Answers to questions she hadn’t even known to ask, let alone how to ask. And now, just when she was beginning to grasp the sheer complexity of it all, it was being cut short.

It seemed her disappointment was written all over her face, because the Rune priest held up both hands in a calming gesture, his tone turning almost amused. “Ah, but of course, I haven’t forgotten my promise to you, Thea. We will not end today’s session without covering your Awakening and me providing explanations for the things you saw.”

Thea’s eyes widened.

She had nearly forgotten about that.

Of all the things they had covered today, that had been the one topic she had both dreaded and looked forward to the most. But in the wake of the countless revelations over the past few hours, it had slipped her mind entirely.

And now that he had brought it back up, a cold weight settled in her chest.

She felt her stomach twist uncomfortably at the thought of reliving that moment.

Even with the Rune priest there to explain and contextualize everything, even knowing she would finally get some form of clarity... The knot in her chest tightened.

*'I doubt I'll ever be fine with that strange series of events...'* she thought, her fingers twitching slightly. *'The Awakening... why did it have to be so fucking weird and terrifying...?'*

"As we have no time to waste," the Rune priest continued, his tone shifting back to its usual confident rhythm, "let's just jump right into it. Take a seat, and we'll start figuring out what this whole Awakening thing is all about."

He settled into his chair, exhaling as he glanced around the empty metallic chamber. Then, shaking his head, he muttered, "Sovereign, bring back the forest."

The walls shimmered in response, the sterile training hall dissolving as the simulated environment rebuilt itself. Within seconds, the forest clearing returned—the familiar rustling of leaves, the soft scent of earth and bark, the distant hum of unseen life filling the air.

The Rune priest smiled as the change finalized. "Since we're not doing Paths and Powers today, we might as well go back to the forest. A much better environment than that dull training hall, don't you think?"

Thea nodded immediately.

She far preferred the fresh air, the gentle breeze, and the soft ground beneath her feet over the lifeless, cold metal of the training room. The forest felt better—less artificial, even if she knew it was all just a simulated projection.

"Now, let's talk Awakening." The Rune priest wasted no time, jumping straight in as he had promised.

"The *Psychic Awakening* is what we generally refer to as the birth moment of a Psyker. It happens once a person reaches close to the required 30 Attribute combined total needed to unlock the *Psychic* Attribute. However, its actual occurrence is primarily determined by a mixture of Resolve and Perception."

He gave her a pointed look. "Which is why you had your Awakening so early. The UHF didn't expect it to happen during your very first Assessment."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "But really, when have things ever gone according to plan with Psykers? They should've known better than to just leave it up to chance... but well, here we are."

With a casual wave of his hand, he dismissed his own tangent and pressed forward.

"The Awakening is a Psyker's initial recognition of their Gate. It's a one-time event, in which the brain fundamentally changes—recognizing and internalizing the existence, nature, and position of a Psyker's Gate within themselves." His expression darkened slightly. "And that's also why it's considered one of the greatest dangers to any Psyker."

His tone grew heavier as he added, "Around 10-15% of all Psykers die during the Awakening process—even with proper training and prior knowledge."

Thea blinked.

Then again, as she tried to process the Rune priest's words.

She had fundamentally known her Awakening had nearly gone horribly wrong, but hearing it presented in raw numbers like that was something else entirely.

*'10-15%?! Fuck me...'*

Her mind whirled, rapidly turning over the implications.

*'And that's **with** the knowledge I didn't have... I guess I got extremely lucky to get out of this alive, didn't I...?'*

A sharp chill ran down her spine.

The Rune priest nodded, clearly taking her reaction as a sign of understanding. "Indeed, you were fairly lucky to get through this without any major, long-lasting problems. Or death."

He smirked. "Death *tends* to be a pretty bad long-term problem, of course."

He held up a single finger. "However, you weren't *unreasonably* lucky either. Let me explain."

With a flick of his wrist, the screen reappeared between them, a simple diagram forming on its surface.

"When it comes to your Gate, there are two main Attributes that govern it, as you know: Resolve and Perception." He gestured to the screen. "Resolve determines the size and control of your Gate, while Perception governs your exact awareness of it—making fine-tuned control much easier."

A small circle appeared at the center of the screen.

"Since you Awakened extremely early, it was because of your high Resolve and Perception working together. Your brain recognized the existence of the Gate earlier than usual—far earlier, in fact—which gave you a triple-whammy of positive influences toward surviving the Awakening."

He tapped the screen, and a second, slightly larger outer circle formed around the first one, its color a shade lighter.

"Assume this is your Gate." He pointed at the inner circle. "Resolve increases its size, as I mentioned." Then, he gestured to the outer circle, "And Perception reduces the threshold needed to realize it exists."

The circles began to shift.

The inner circle expanded—growing larger as Resolve increased—while the outer circle slowly contracted inward, shrinking as Perception heightened awareness of the Gate.

Thea watched as the two circles moved toward one another, steadily converging.

“This is what happened in your case,” the Rune priest continued, eyes focused on the display. “At this point—during one of your Attribute investments from leveling up—your brain finally realized something was there.”

The circles touched.

A brief pulse of light flashed across the screen, indicating the moment of realization.

“Deep inside of your chest—but also... *not* your chest.” The Rune priest gave her a knowing look. “Your brain tried to reconcile this contradiction, and in doing so, it went absolutely haywire. It locked onto the ‘thing’—your Gate—trying to focus all attention on it to identify what it was, while also struggling to fully comprehend whether it even existed in the first place.”

He chuckled to himself, shaking his head slightly. “After all, the Gate *isn’t* a physical object. It isn’t something you can touch, move, or see. It is the Soul’s bridge between the material plane and the Void.”

He tapped his chest lightly. “Your Soul exists in both planes at the same time, and your Gate is the connecting piece—the link that allows you to exist in the material plane at all.”

Thea nodded slowly, her eyes still on the screen, watching as the two circles pulsed faintly against each other.

Surprisingly, she found herself following along with relative ease.

These were all topics she had either been told before, overheard, or concluded on her own. Nothing about this felt out of place—in fact, it made sense in a way the Inheritances hadn’t.

Her brows furrowed slightly.

*‘This is so much more complicated than the Inheritances, but somehow way easier for me to follow... Why is everything so backwards with this Psychic shit?!’*

“Now, in order for your brain to reconcile this metaphysical object existing, it forces your Gate to open wide—essentially creating the clearest possible image of it to take a closer look,” the Rune priest explained, his gaze locking onto Thea’s as the implications settled in her mind.

A cold weight formed in her stomach.

“...And *that’s* what causes those 10-15% of Psykers to die, isn’t it?” she said slowly, the pieces falling into place. “The Gate was too wide open for too long, and they got... consumed.”

The Rune priest nodded, a mixture of satisfaction and solemnity on his face.

“Correct. The very thing your brain needs to do in order to understand the Gate is also the one thing that can destroy you.”

He let the words hang for a moment before continuing. “But it’s a necessity. Without your brain’s conscious recognition of the Gate, you wouldn’t be able to control it at all. It’s a battle of will—a test to see whether you come out the other side... or not.”

He gestured back toward the diagram on the screen, the pulsing circles still displayed.

“Now, *your* advantage,” he said, pointing at the inner circle, “was that you had your Awakening this early.”

A new ring formed around the previous circles—a third one, expanding outward.

“The older a Soul, and the more Energy that has been inserted into it by the *Allbright System*, the larger the Gate becomes.” He tapped the outermost ring for emphasis. “Resolve is not the only thing that affects the Gate’s output. The higher Level you are, and the more Attributes you’ve invested, the more difficult the Awakening will become.”

Thea followed his reasoning immediately.

“So because I Awakened early, with only Resolve and Perception as my Attributes, the threshold was as small as it could possibly be. And since I had a lot of Resolve, I was able to control the Gate and force it shut before I could be consumed.” She paused, considering. “Perception helped because it let my brain recognize what was happening earlier—it gave me a clearer grasp of the Gate’s exact nature, so I had an easier time figuring out that closing it was even an option...?”

The Rune priest’s satisfied smile returned as he nodded.

“Very good. You are absolutely correct, Thea.”

His tone carried genuine approval, something deeper than just academic acknowledgment.

“The combination of your Attributes and the early timing of your Awakening made it easier for you to handle the process overall. But.” His expression grew a shade more serious. “That doesn’t mean it was *easy* on you. Far from it.”

He met her gaze. “Considering that you had absolutely *no idea* it was coming, no understanding of what was happening, and no knowledge of how to get out of it—the fact that you managed to survive it at all is remarkable in itself.”

His smile softened slightly.

“You can be very proud of that. Truly.”

The Rune priest gave her a moment to process before continuing, his tone measured. “Now, when it comes to the Awakening, one thing you’ve likely realized is that time does not flow the same for the one experiencing it as it does for those around them. In the report about your Assessment, I read that you confided in your Squad Medic about it—telling her how *long* it felt, when in reality, absolutely nothing happened.”

Thea nodded immediately.

This was something she vividly remembered.

A cold shudder ran through her as she thought back to that terrifying moment—where she had nearly lost herself.

Two giant cyan eyes, staring down at her. Watching.

Observing.

*She had observed herself, as she observed herself, observing herself, observing herself...*

A hollow, sickening vertigo twisted in her gut, and she violently shook her head, forcing the memory back into its corner.

The Rune priest watched her closely.

"I see that you know *exactly* what I mean," he said, his voice softer now, carrying a rare note of genuine sympathy.

"As a matter of fact, however," he continued, "the Awakening happens in an *instant*. That's why there's no way for anyone to interfere with it. Outside of prior training and exercises, nothing can be done to help you in the moment—because it happens in a literal fraction of a singular moment."

Thea's eyebrows shot up.

*'It all happened instantly...? That's not possible...!'*

"The reason for that," the Rune priest explained, "is because, during the Awakening, you are—very, very, very briefly—channeling the very Void itself into the material plane. And with it... you bring its property of not having Time at all."

Thea's breath caught in her throat.

"You are effectively creating a small area around yourself where time ceases to exist within our universe—while you experience the Awakening."

She didn't even know how to begin processing that.

"The wider your Gate opens," he continued, gesturing with his hands as if illustrating an unseen force, "the more of the Void seeps into our universe. And that is also what makes Psychic Overloads so incredibly dangerous." His tone darkened. "While they aren't bound to bring the aspect of non-existent Time with them... They also aren't just bursts of uncontrolled power. They are very literal, uncontrolled tears in reality of our universe itself."

His eyes flicked back to hers.

"This is why every ship in the UHF Navy has multiple Nulls aboard—to curtail a Psychic Overload. If a Psyker goes too far, their only option is to kill them before they kill everyone aboard the ship."

Thea swallowed hard.

She had heard parts of this before. More than once.

But having it contextualized like this... having it connected directly to her Awakening...

It made her stomach turn and twist, but the Rune priest wasn't finished.

"And *this*," he continued, "is why you, as a Psyker, should *never* try to push your Gate beyond its natural limit. Once you go too far, there is no coming back."

He held up a single hand, palm open.

"Go beyond a certain point... and your Gate will run away from you. A chain reaction you cannot stop. Your Soul will be ripped apart, pulled apart by forces you cannot control—until it finally goes *pop*..."

He snapped his fingers. The sound was sharp. Sudden.

"...And you take everything around you with you—into eternal damnation."

Thea swallowed again, her throat dry.

*'I barely clawed my way back from my Awakening... and that was the smallest version of this process possible...?'*

She inhaled slowly, steadying herself.

*'I really **did** get lucky, didn't I...?'*

Luckily, the Rune priest was once again willing to barrel forward, leaving Thea no time to spiral into existential what-ifs.

"Now, with that theoretical groundwork out of the way, I say we take a closer look at your very own Awakening." His tone shifted, taking on a more enthusiastic and excited edge. "As I mentioned earlier, every Awakening is wholly unique to the Psyker that experiences it, so we'll have to do a bit of a dive into your memories for this one."

Thea barely had time to process that statement before the Rune priest turned his gaze toward the forest around them.

"Sovereign," he said, his voice carrying that same commanding ease, "load us up in the troop transporter that brought Thea to the frontlines during her Awakening. Same setup, same environment."

The world around them shifted instantly.

The air thickened, the scent of damp metal and reinforced plating replacing the crisp freshness of the simulated forest. The rustling of leaves faded into the distant hum of an engine, the faint vibration of movement traveling up through her boots.

Thea's eyes widened as she suddenly found herself seated in the back of a transporter, the dim interior lit by the cold glow of overhead strips. She could feel the subtle, rhythmic rumble beneath her—the unmistakable sensation of a vehicle in motion.

They were driving.

Heading back toward the eastern front.

Her breath hitched slightly.

The details were *perfect*.

The worn-down benches, the scent of oil and sweat, the faint rattle of loose gear strapped to the walls. Even the muffled voices of Marines around them—voices she hadn't heard in what felt like a lifetime—echoed faintly through the space.

It was *exactly* as she remembered it.

And then—

“Now,” the Rune priest said, grinning toothily as he leaned back into his seat, “let's do this whole Awakening thing over again, shall we?”

A shiver ran down Thea's spine...