

Volume 2 - Chapter 6 - Passive Energy

Thea's mind was a storm of thoughts, each one vying for dominance as she struggled to sift through the myriad of questions swirling in her head.

It was as though the sheer weight of the opportunity had frozen her ability to prioritize.

For weeks now, she would have done just about *anything* for a chance like this—to stand in the presence of possibly the most experienced Psyker in existence and have a chance to glean even a fraction of his knowledge.

But now, with the moment staring her square in the face, she felt utterly paralyzed.

Her thoughts ricocheted wildly, each more urgent than the last, *'Do I ask about the Attributes first? No, that feels too basic. Maybe about those strange visions during the Awakening...? But what about that vision of the other me—the one I saw at the end of the Assessment? But what if that's just normal Psyker stuff, that doesn't really mean anything...?'*

She was acutely aware of the Rune priest's presence—how his eyes seemed to dissect her without moving, his calm but expectant demeanor practically daring her to say something profound.

It was clear to her that this wasn't just a casual Q&A.

This was definitely a test.

His earlier words continued to echo in her mind. *"Boring questions are a waste of my time."*

Thea's heart sank at the thought of squandering this chance, her nerves flaring as she tried to calculate her best course of action.

If she started with something too simple, he'd lose interest.

Too abstract, and she risked sounding foolish.

The Rune priest was eccentric, yes, but he also exuded an unmistakable air of ice-cold efficiency—like a blade honed to perfection and beyond.

She had no doubt that he would shut her down if she failed to meet his expectations.

And with so much on the line, failure *wasn't* an option.

Just as Major Quinn had said, there was no chance she would ever get an opportunity like this. Being taught first-hand by a Rune priest, becoming his pupil for the foreseeable future...

She *had* to ask the right question.

But that didn't make finding the right question any easier.

'What question am I dying to know?' she repeated his earlier challenge in her mind.

Once. Twice. A third time.

‘...*dying* to know...’

And then, as if a switch had been flipped, clarity washed over her, ‘*Of course!*’

There weren't *really* a thousand questions she needed to ask first.

Thea turned her gaze to the Rune priest, catching the faint shift in his posture as his sharp eyes narrowed ever so slightly. Expectations were practically *etched* onto his face.

“How did I die? At the end of the Assessment, I mean,” Thea asked, her tone calm but tinged with the frustration that had gnawed at her since it happened. “I’m sure you’ve either had a rundown or maybe even seen the full recording of what happened—I don’t understand why my Precognition didn’t do... *anything*. Like, at all. And I couldn’t see through the illusions or whatever it was that hid everything, even though I’ve always been able to do that before. I learned later that we had been facing a Psyker, but how can another Psyker influence my Precognition to that degree without directly attacking me...?”

Much to her relief, a smile slowly spread across the Rune priest’s face as she finished the question. It wasn’t a mocking or dismissive one either—it was one of approval.

Thea felt her shoulders relax slightly as a thought flitted through her mind: ‘*He doesn’t hate the question. Perfect.*’

The Rune priest cupped his beardless chin, his gaze turning inward as if weighing her words carefully. After a moment, he nodded to himself.

Without a word, he stood from his chair, the sudden movement catching Thea off guard.

“I think,” he began, his voice rich with certainty, “this is one of those instances where a demonstration would be quite handy, don’t you think?”

Before Thea could respond, he walked a few steps away and with a subtle gesture, he motioned for her to remain seated.

When he stopped about five meters away, he turned back toward her, his intense gaze locking onto hers.

“Your current Psychic Powers are *extremely* limited,” he began, his tone instructive but patient. “As you undoubtedly know yourself already, your [Eyes of the Void] are permanently active, as are your Precognitive Senses. This is not the norm for Psykers, generally speaking. Once you unlock your Psychic Attribute, I will teach you how to activate and deactivate them at will.”

Thea raised an eyebrow at that, curiosity bubbling up.

“You might be asking,” he continued, “‘*Why would I even want that?*’ since they seem to only convey upsides based on your experiences so far. But the instance that led to your death during the Assessment is a clear case where they directly *caused* the issue you faced.”

Her brow furrowed.

She fought the urge to interrupt, biting her tongue as the Rune priest's words began to stitch together a picture she didn't fully understand yet.

Then, from one moment to the next, he *vanished*.

Thea's stomach dropped as she was struck with the now-familiar strain that came with her [Eyes of the Void] encountering illusions or invisibility. Her vision blurred and strained against an unseen force, the sensation sharp and disorienting as ever.

Instinct took over.

Drawing on the practice she'd honed during the Assessment, she focused on her eyes and pushed mentally against the distortion. The strain peaked and then shattered like glass, revealing Rune priest Vedun standing exactly where he had been just moments before.

"Good, good," he said with a slight chuckle, his expression pleased. "I'm happy to see I didn't need to tell you what to do."

Thea exhaled deeply, only then realizing she'd been holding her breath since the strain began. The last month of life-or-death reactions had clearly left its mark, her psyche conditioned to see every scenario as overtly lethal, no matter how much she *knew* this was all just training.

"Now," Vedun began, his tone calm but deliberate, "what I used was your run-of-the-mill illusion or invisibility Power. Against a Veritas Inheritance such as yours, such tricks stand little chance. Veritas, after all, is the *Truth*. Your [Eyes of the Void] reveal the universe as it is, cutting through other people's attempts to obscure or distort it."

He leaned casually against the trunk of a nearby tree.

"But what happens," he continued, his tone darkening slightly, "when an enemy Psyker wants not just to hide the truth, but to *change* it? Illusion and invisibility Powers don't break any universal laws. They manipulate perception or bend light—clever tricks, yes, but nothing that rewrites the fabric of reality itself. They don't *falsify* the universe; they simply obscure its surface."

Thea had never thought about it this way before, but what Vedun was saying rang true—or at least, as true as her limited understanding could make sense of.

"I... guess that makes sense," she ventured cautiously, her brow furrowing. "But how does the Veritas Inheritance differentiate it, then...?"

"That," Vedun drawled, his grin spreading wide like a cat toying with its prey, "is the right question, my dear pupil. And the answer? It lies in effort of will. Psychic Powers, as much as they are rooted in science and universal laws, are equally *esoteric* in nature. Will and intent are the cornerstones of their manifestation."

He bent down and picked up two small, weathered rocks from the ground, holding one in each hand. The motion was deliberate, almost reverent, and Thea's focus sharpened instinctively.

"Let's simplify things," he said, holding the stones aloft in his palms. "These rocks will make the concept much clearer."

As Thea watched, the rocks began to rise, floating just above his hands.

The sight was unremarkable at first glance—until the rocks moved.

The stone in his left palm oscillated up and down in a slow, steady rhythm.

The stone in his right hand, however, drew smooth circles in the air instead.

"The only difference here is my intent for the Power," Vedun continued, his voice calm and instructive as the rocks hovered steadily above his hands. "The weight of the rocks is almost identical, as is the usage of my Psychic Energy as a whole. Now, if we increase the energy throughput just a little..."

He trailed off deliberately, the rocks suddenly accelerating.

Their movements became a blur, streaking through the air so quickly that Thea could no longer follow them with her eyes. The stone in his left hand seemed to form a solid line, a continuous stroke of motion, while the one in his right hand created a perfect, glowing circle.

Both trails shimmered faintly, like ghostly imprints left behind by their speed.

"We reach a point," Vedun continued, his tone almost clinical, "where it's practically impossible to tell where the rock is, correct?"

Thea nodded after a brief moment of concentration, her brow furrowing.

She tried her hardest to pinpoint the exact position of either rock, but no matter how much she focused, their true locations eluded her.

"Your Veritas Inheritance would not help you here, either," Vedun explained, his words laced with an edge of authority. "It's not that the truth of the universe is obscured in any way, here—it's that your very Perception is failing you. With a higher Perception Attribute, you might differentiate between the after-images and the real object. But as it stands now, you're completely out of luck."

Thea opened her mouth to respond, but before she could form a word, the rocks vanished.

The sudden silence felt deafening after the rhythmic hum of their movements.

She jumped as a thunderous crack split the air behind her.

Whipping around, her eyes widened at the sight of the tree trunk directly behind her—its center utterly obliterated.

A massive crater gaped in the wood, jagged and splintered as if it had been struck by a tank round. There was no trace of the rocks; they were likely atomized by the sheer force of the impact.

“That was cra—” Thea began, her words trailing off as she turned back toward Vedun.

Her heart sank slightly when she realized he was gone. *Again.*

“Oh,” she muttered, her head swiveling as she scanned the surrounding area. The forest felt eerily silent, save for the faint rustle of leaves in the breeze and the echo of the destruction behind her.

Thea closed her eyes for a moment, centering herself as her thoughts raced.

‘Focus, focus, focus.’

She opened her eyes again, willing her [Eyes of the Void] to activate fully.

The familiar pressure of energy gathering behind her eyes began to build as she scanned the trees, the shadows, the ground—anywhere that might betray even the faintest hint of the Rune priest’s presence.

But there was nothing.

No flickering distortion, no shimmering outline, no telltale sign of an illusion or an invisibility Power. Not even a hint of strain on her [Eyes of the Void].

Just the still, unbroken expanse of the forest around her.

Her brow furrowed in frustration. *‘Is he really not here? Or am I missing something...?’*

She tried again, straining her vision as hard as she dared, but the result was the same: Absolutely nothing.

Her mind raced to another possibility.

‘What if he walked out of my line of sight? Am I allowed to move...?’

The thought made her glance down at her seated position.

He hadn’t told her explicitly to stay still, had he? But then again, he hadn’t said she could move, either. Knowing how meticulous and deliberate the Rune priest seemed to be, she decided not to test the boundaries of what might be an unspoken rule.

Instead, she took a deep breath and began replaying his earlier words in her mind.

“Psychic Powers are as much about science as they are esotericism. Your will and intent play as much of a role in their manifestation as the very laws of the universe.”

‘Intent,’ she thought, chewing on the word as her gaze flicked toward the crater in the tree.

The lesson had been deliberate—he'd shown her how the same Psychic Power could produce vastly different results depending on what you wanted it to do.

She shifted her focus inward. *'Okay then... Intent. My will. My Perception.'*

It felt like the pieces of a puzzle were hovering just out of reach, but she couldn't quite put them together. Was she supposed to use her Perception differently? Or was the key in the energy she was expending?

Her thoughts flashed to the rocks spinning in the Rune priest's hands. They'd moved differently, not because of any external force or the nature of the Psychic Power he had used, but because his will had shaped their paths individually.

'What if... Maybe I'm not just supposed to look for him? What if I'm supposed to will him into being found...?'

The idea felt absurd and strange, but so was most of what she'd learned about being a Psyker so far. Yet something about the Rune priest's lesson and his deliberate demonstrations had planted a seed of understanding that was beginning to take root—or so she wanted to believe, at least.

Straightening slightly, she closed her eyes, letting her breathing steady.

*It's not about figuring out **whether** he's there—it's about understanding that he **is** there and revealing that truth.* The thought anchored her, sharpening her focus.

When she opened her eyes, she locked her gaze on the tree where she'd last seen him leaning so casually.

'You're there, Rune priest. I know you're leaning against that very tree. You can't fool me.' She repeated the thought like a mantra in her head, forcing her intent into every syllable.

She tried to force her [Eyes of the Void] to adhere to her will, channeling her energy toward that faint but familiar pressure behind her eyes. The pressure began to build as beads of sweat formed on her brow.

'Come on, show me. I know you're there..!'

But nothing changed.

Frustration welled up, bubbling just beneath the surface.

Her breathing quickened, her fists clenching against her thighs.

She pushed harder, funneling every ounce of willpower into that mounting pressure, as though sheer force alone could tear down whatever illusion shielded him.

And then, suddenly, *something* shifted.

That familiar strain behind her eyes surged, sharp and demanding. Her head throbbed, the sensation nearly overwhelming, but she didn't falter.

She pushed through the pain, summoning every ounce of energy and focus she had left.

With one last determined surge, the illusion shattered like a pane of glass falling to the floor, revealing the Rune priest casually leaning against the tree, his arms crossed and a knowing smirk on his face.

Thea exhaled sharply, the tension in her body releasing all at once as she collapsed back into her chair. Her breathing came in heavy, uneven bursts, and the sheen of sweat across her forehead caught the dappled light filtering through the trees.

"Well done," the Rune priest said at last, his voice carrying a measured tone of approval. He strode back to his own chair with an easy confidence, the faint smile never leaving his lips.

Settling into his seat, he regarded her with a mixture of pride and expectation.

"While it's clear that you are utterly drained from those efforts," he continued, his voice steady and instructional, "you must understand the significance of what you've just accomplished. You didn't simply apply brute force to your Power—that would have been futile. No, you changed the very intent of your [Eyes of the Void]. Your previous approach wouldn't have been able to pierce through my concealment, no matter how much energy you poured into it. Barring, of course, exceeding my own reserves, which..."

He chuckled, a rich, almost amused sound. "Well, let's just say you're not *quite* there yet."

Thea managed a tired, crooked smile. As much as his chuckle had the faintest hint of condescension, she couldn't argue with the truth of it.

"But with your altered intent," he continued, his tone growing sharper and more focused, "you narrowed the scope of the Power's application, refining it to achieve what was necessary. This is the fundamental nature of Psychic Powers: Intent and Will. Restrictions, my dear pupil, are not weaknesses—they are the means to greater strength. Each time you add an additional layer of intent to a Power, you change its functionality. Narrow the scope, and the output intensifies. Widen it, and the energy coefficient suffers."

He leaned forward slightly, resting his chin on one hand while his other tapped idly on the armrest of his chair. His gaze sharpened, as though he were dissecting her very thoughts.

"Now," he said, his curiosity evident, "what, pray tell, was the intent you chose for your [Eyes of the Void] this time? What was the thought that guided your will?"

Thea hesitated, catching her breath and steadying herself as she replayed the moment in her mind.

"I... I didn't try to *find* you," she said. "I... Intended for the truth of where you were to be *undeniable*. It wasn't about guessing or searching—it was about revealing the fact that you *were* there, no matter what."

The Rune priest's smile deepened, a gleam of satisfaction lighting his eyes. "Ah, now *that* is the proper mindset for a Veritas Psyker. Well done, indeed... That *also* explains how you managed to shatter my illusion," he added, a trace of a rueful chuckle in his tone.

“Wasn’t... wasn’t that the whole point?” Thea asked between labored breaths, confusion threading through her exhaustion.

He shook his head slowly, his smile never wavering. “No. No, it was not. The goal was for you to experiment with your intent, to discover the ways you could direct your Power to locate me. It was never about pitting your Psychic Power directly against mine.”

He paused, his gaze softening slightly. “I was very close to dispelling my illusion myself when I saw how dangerously close you were to Overdrawing your Focus reserves. That final push of energy was almost too much for you, but...”

He spread his hands theatrically. “Just barely, you managed to break through without my interference.”

Thea’s eyes widened at his words.

‘I nearly overdrew my Focus again...?’ The thought struck like a hammer, and the bone-deep weariness in her limbs and mind left no room for her to doubt it.

The Rune priest didn’t give her long to dwell, however.

“And, by the way,” he continued smoothly, “the illusion you just destroyed? It was on par with what a Tier 4 Battlefield Psyker would be capable of maintaining.”

Her thoughts ground to a halt, her mind going blank as her jaw fell open.

“A Tier... *what?*” she stammered, unable to reconcile the enormity of what she’d just heard.

His deep, rumbling laughter filled the clearing, rich and unrestrained, as he clapped his hands together with evident glee. “*Exactly!* That’s the power of the right intent, will, and Inheritance working together in harmony, my dear pupil. Where your intent and will shape the Power and determine its energy efficiency, the Inheritance amplifies those factors exponentially.”

He leaned forward, fixing her with a pointed look. “Veritas, as an Inheritance, is particularly unique. Unlike most others, it is exceedingly *binary* in its application. It doesn’t lend itself to a variety of modes or uses—it has one, singular purpose: To reveal the *Truth*. Your only real choice is deciding how much of that truth you want to uncover.”

With a graceful wave of his hand, a digital screen materialized in the air before him, hovering at an angle that allowed Thea a clear view. On the screen, she could see what appeared to be a simple graph, the x-axis unlabeled and the y-axis with numbers.

Her curiosity piqued, but she remained silent, waiting for his explanation.

“Now,” he said, gesturing to the graph, “let’s simplify this for the sake of clarity. Given that you’re still Tier 0 and haven’t unlocked the Psychic Attribute, your overall energy reserves are naturally quite limited. Let’s assign your total reserves an arbitrary value of 100. This represents the full amount of energy you can allocate to any given Psychic Power you possess.”

As he spoke, a bar chart appeared on the graph. The single bar shot up to the 100 mark on the y-axis, illustrating his point. Thea leaned forward slightly, her eyes narrowing as she studied it.

The Rune priest continued as he gestured to the screen, “assuming you properly align your intent and will, and apply a stringent focus like you did earlier, you effectively multiply your energy output manifold. Based on what I observed, the intent you used earlier likely carried a multiplier of around 10 to 15 times your base energy.”

Another bar chart materialized on the screen next to the first.

This new bar shot up dramatically, soaring past the 1,000 mark on the y-axis and finally stabilizing around the 1,500 line.

“You can undoubtedly see the massive difference this already makes,” he remarked, his tone laced with approval. “But when we add the influence of your Inheritance after the fact...”

His words trailed off as a third bar chart appeared.

This one surged upward at an astonishing rate, its ascent almost mesmerizing.

Thea’s eyes widened as the numbers climbed higher and higher.

3,000... 6,000... 12,000...

Her breath caught when the bar finally stopped its relentless rise, stabilizing around the 27,000 mark. Unlike the previous bars, this one bore a single label: “Veritas.”

“The Veritas Inheritance,” the Rune priest began, turning his attention back to Thea, “despite its seeming simplicity, is one of the most potent Inheritances in existence. Its power lies in its binary nature—its absolute dedication to revealing *Truth*. What you sacrifice in versatility, you more than make up for in raw, unrelenting power.”

He gestured toward the towering bar on the chart. “When applied to scenarios where its design fits perfectly—like breaking through an illusion or invisibility field—Veritas can amplify your effective energy by 20 times or more. That is the *true strength* of an Inheritance, Thea. It doesn’t merely supplement your Psychic Powers; it defines and enhances them in ways that raw power alone could never achieve.”

Thea swallowed, her gaze still fixed on the graph.

The Rune priest leaned back slightly, his voice softening but losing none of its authority. “This is why your Inheritance will influence nearly every Psyker-related decision you make from this point onward. While it *is* entirely possible to use Psychic Powers *without* drawing on the strength of your Inheritance, I trust this little demonstration illustrates *why* it is rarely a wise choice. Letting Veritas guide and augment your efforts will almost always yield results far beyond what you could achieve alone.”

Thea nodded, though her attention remained locked on the graphs still floating in the air, her mind grappling with the implications of the Rune priest’s words. “Yeah, I can see that...”

The Rune priest's voice pulled her back into the moment.

"Returning to your original question," he said, catching Thea off-guard. She had almost entirely forgotten the query that had sparked this entire conversation. "The answer becomes quite clear now: The enemy Psyker simply used more energy in their illusion than you could passively overcome with your Veritas-influenced [Eyes of the Void]."

The current bar charts vanished, replaced by two new ones. The first, labeled "*Thea*," showed a bar capping at around 4,000, while the second, labeled "*Enemy*," shot up to 6,000.

"These numbers are, of course, illustrative nonsense," the Rune priest clarified, gesturing at the screen. "But the point remains. Without additional intent or will behind your [Eyes of the Void], this represents the approximate limits of your passive Power's capability."

He raised his hands slightly, a placating gesture as if preempting potential frustration. "To be *entirely clear*, even this baseline capability is incredibly impressive. Your passive [Eyes of the Void] are sufficient to pierce through Tier 2 or even some Tier 3 stealth technology. Most Psykers below Tier 3 won't have the reserves or inclination to bolster their illusions to this extent, especially not preemptively. Unless you're regularly facing Prime Tier 3 Psykers—or those above—you're *more* than equipped to handle most challenges as you are now."

Despite the praise, Thea frowned, the explanation leaving her with more questions than answers. "But... the Psyker we faced wasn't a Battlefield Ace. He couldn't have been more than Prime Tier 1 at best. How does that make sense, Rune priest?"

The Rune priest leaned back in his chair, a grin spreading across his face that spoke of plans unfolding exactly as intended. "Surely, my dear pupil, you didn't expect to be the only one blessed with an Inheritance?"

Thea hesitated.

Of course, she had assumed others might have Inheritances. It was only logical.

But the Rune priest himself had emphasized Veritas's overwhelming potency in exposing hidden things. Even if the enemy Psyker had an Inheritance that enhanced their illusion, shouldn't her Veritas one have prevailed either way...?

"No, of course not," Thea replied, careful with her words. "But you just explained how Veritas should be practically unmatched in revealing hidden truths. So, either I misunderstood something, or there's more to this equation that I'm missing..."

The Rune priest's grin widened, his eyes gleaming with approval. "Good, good! I like that you're willing to challenge me. Very good!"

With a sharp snap of his fingers, the graph on the screen vanished, replaced by a glowing, intricate 12-pointed star. Each point on it shimmered faintly, connected by luminous lines that pulsed rhythmically like a beating heart.

“You are correct,” the Rune priest said, gesturing to the star. “You *are* missing something. Something essential that I haven’t explained yet: *Inheritance Polarities*. And I think it’s high time we delve into them, don’t you...?”