

Volume 2 - Chapter 8 - Inheritance II

Staring at the husked remains of the trees, Thea felt a pressing question rise to the forefront of her mind. Turning toward the Rune priest, she asked, “How... How would anyone *ever* survive this? If you can’t extinguish the flame because you can’t touch it... Do you just, like... *die* if you get hit? Kind of like IgT-compound? How would I defend against it if I didn’t even see it coming?”

The Rune priest’s face lit up with excitement as he clapped his hands together, the sound sharp in the now-silent clearing. Pointing his fingers at her with a wide smile, he said, “Great question! And the answer is as easy as it is complex. But I’ll try to keep it as simple as possible, considering how far we are into your Psychic studies.”

“There are generally three ways to defend against any given Psychic Power,” he began, raising his left hand, starting to count off from zero with his fingers.

“First—and most commonly considered the primary avenue of defense—is *Resolve*. Unlike these trees, which possess an aura like all things do to some degree, humans *also* possess Resolve. Whether you’re Integrated or not, everyone has some level of Resolve. The only exception, of course, is Nulls—but we’ll discuss those later.”

‘Nulls?’ The word echoed in Thea’s mind, ringing with a faint familiarity. After a brief pause, it clicked. *‘Right, Zach mentioned something about them during the Assessment... Something about their Gates being the opposite of ours as Psykers...?’*

The Rune priest carried on, unfazed by her wandering thoughts. “Resolve is the fundamental defense against anything Void-related. The more Resolve you have, the more resilient you are to anything a Psyker does to directly affect you. Pay attention to my wording there: *Directly* affect you. If a Psyker drops a tank on your head, for instance, your Resolve won’t save you—because the Psyker isn’t *directly* affecting you. The tank is.”

Thea blinked.

*‘Wait what... Psykers can just **do** that? Drop a fucking tank on people?’*

The sheer absurdity of the image left her caught off guard.

The Rune priest must have noticed the look on her face because he gave her a playful wink, as if dropping a tank on someone’s head was merely a casual example rather than a horrifyingly practical application.

“We’ll delve deeper into the specifics of Resolve and its interaction with Psykers and their Powers later, when we cover *all* the Attributes in that regard,” the Rune priest elaborated, his tone even but with an undercurrent of emphasis. “For now, just know that Resolve can drastically reduce the effects of something like the Fireball I just demonstrated.”

He raised his second and third fingers briefly, punctuating his words. “The second and third methods of defense are Psyker-exclusive—or require a very, very specific subset of Allbright

System Abilities to exploit. For that reason, they're generally not considered viable options for non-Psykers."

With a flick of his wrist, he lowered his third finger, leaving only two standing.

"The second option, simple yet effective: Cut off the affected area," he said matter-of-factly. "There are quite a number of Psychic Powers and Inheritances that cause continuous effects—things that consume or destroy over time. These lingering effects can often be stopped by simply removing the affected area from the greater whole. Think of it like amputating an infected limb to stop the spread of an infection to more vital parts."

He gestured toward the tree husks nearby, their brittle remnants standing as a reminder to the Auras-fire's destructive capabilities. "In the case of Auras-fire, this principle still applies, though it requires a *bit* more effort. Cutting off an Aura is more complicated than removing a physical limb, but the logic is the same: Isolate and remove the affected portions of the Aura to protect the rest from further damage. Once the afflicted portion is severed, the rest of the Aura is no longer at risk. Simple enough, right?"

Thea nodded thoughtfully, the concept clicking into place easily. It made a lot of sense, especially in light of her own, recent experiences. The split-second decisions required during the IgT-bombardment on the eastern front during the Assessment came to mind immediately.

She remembered the chaos, the rapidly spreading devastation, and the critical, life-saving actions taken by the Heavy's that had escorted her and Lucas back to the safety of the trenches.

Finally, the Rune priest raised his third finger again, a playful smirk spreading across his face. "And the third, final method is where we circle back to your original question, in a way: *Polarities*."

He gestured toward the Inheritance Polarity Star still hovering gently at Thea's side, the points of colours glimmering faintly. "For every Inheritance, there is effectively an exact opposite—its *Polarity*. Much like magnetic fields have a north and a south pole that attract or repel each other, Inheritances follow the same principle. This is what we refer to as Polarities. The Polarity of the Auras Inheritance is the Nihilus Inheritance, represented by the Abyss Black colour."

He pointed toward the pitch-black gem at the 9-o'clock position on the star, directly opposite the Radiant Gold gem representing his own Auras Inheritance.

"A Nihilus Psyker," the Rune priest continued, "is the *exact* antithesis to me in terms of Inheritance. If given the exact same Power, Intent, and Energy, their Nihilus-Fireball would directly cancel out my Auras-Fireball, resulting in what we call a *Voiding*. When Psychic Powers of opposite Polarities clash, they neutralize each other in an instant."

To illustrate, the Rune priest conjured two spheres of light before Thea.

One mirrored the Aurae-Fireball from earlier. The other was its opposite—viscerally black, so unnaturally dark it seemed to flatten into two dimensions, as if the concept of depth itself had abandoned it.

He brought the two spheres together slowly, and as they touched, they collapsed into each other with a brief, soundless implosion, winking out of existence.

“Much like this demonstration,” he said, turning back to her, “the Powers cancel each other out entirely, provided they are close enough in overall Psychic Energy. If we refer back to our numbers example from earlier, a Polarity Voiding would require the two opposing Powers to be within roughly 10-15% of each other’s energy level to trigger the effect. Outside of that range, the stronger Power would simply crush and absorb the weaker one, resulting in an overall more powerful effect.”

He gestured toward the space where the two spheres had vanished. “Of course, this demonstration isn’t a perfect representation, as well. As an Aurae Psyker, I *can’t* actually conjure Powers through another Inheritance. What you saw were just illusions I created to help visualize the concept.” His playful smirk returned as he chuckled softly, before adding with a thoughtful tone in his voice, “That’s probably something to note: All Psykers can only ever have one Inheritance; which is set at the inception of your Soul. You are born with a specific Inheritance, which is why we refer to them as such, and it cannot be changed.”

Thea nodded, her eyes lingering on the empty space where the two spheres had vanished.

The demonstration had been simple but deeply illuminating.

“So... what you’re saying is that, at the end of the Assessment...” she began, her voice measured as she worked through the thought, “I ran into a Psyker who was my *Polarity*. That’s why my Veritas [Eyes of the Void] couldn’t pierce their Illusions. I was actually making their Illusions stronger by continuously pumping my own Psychic Energy into their Power...?”

She trailed off, her brow furrowing as she pieced the idea together, overlaying the Rune priest’s explanation onto her memory of those final, chaotic moments during the Assessment.

The realization was unsettling, but it also explained the inexplicable struggle she’d faced, where her usually reliable Power had felt completely useless against her opponent.

The Rune priest’s face lit up with excitement as Thea finished speaking, his animated demeanor almost childlike in its enthusiasm. “*Exactly!*” he exclaimed, clapping his hands together before pulling the Polarity Star closer to them.

He gestured toward the 11-o’clock position on the star, where a Luminous White gem gleamed with a soft, radiant glow.

“Here,” he said, pointing to the gem, “is your Inheritance: *Veritas*. The Truth. It embodies the clarity and unfiltered Truth of the Void; an Inheritance capable of piercing through deception and illusions to reveal what the Void understands about our universe in its most fundamental form. This is *your* foundation, your core as a Psyker.”

Without pausing, he moved his hand to the exact opposite side of the star, at the 5-o'clock position, where a gem of deep Royal Purple shimmered faintly.

"And here," he continued, his tone turning slightly more serious, "is the Polarity of Veritas: the *Obscuritas* Inheritance. Where Veritas brings Truth into focus, Obscuritas excels in obscuring that very Truth. It thrives in deception, illusions, and hiding the very reality you strive to reveal."

He tapped the purple gem gently. "This is the Inheritance your assailant wielded during the Assessment. Their *Obscuritas* Powers directly countered your *Veritas* Powers. Every time you channeled more Psychic Energy to try and overcome their Illusions, you unknowingly fed their strength, allowing them to bolster their deception even further. *Polarity* at its most effective."

Thea's eyes darted between the two gems, the Luminous White and the Royal Purple, her thoughts racing as the full picture began to take shape.

"So... I was doomed from the start, then?" she asked, her voice tinged with frustration.

"No, no, not quite that drastic!" the Rune priest interjected immediately, holding up a hand to calm her. "Don't misunderstand me, here. Just because Polarities *can* cannibalize each other's Energies doesn't mean you're *bound* to lose every head-to-head clash. Especially in something like illusions and the attempts to pierce them—there's a lot more going on than a simple numbers game."

The Rune priest cupped his chin, his familiar gesture of contemplation, his gaze momentarily drifting as he seemed to weigh how best to explain.

After a brief pause, he nodded to himself and snapped his fingers.

Above his hand, two small, glowing representations appeared—a white sphere representing Veritas and a purple one for Obscuritas.

"Let me break it down," he said, meeting Thea's gaze again. "When a Psyker uses a Power with a consistent effect—not something straightforward like a Fireball, but something complex like illusions with an ongoing, continuous effect—they have to consider two additional factors beyond the usual Power, Intent, and Inheritance: *Peak Energy Drain* and *Continuous Energy Drain*."

Thea tilted her head slightly, her brow furrowed. "What's the difference?"

"Peak Energy Drain is the initial amount of energy the Psyker has to invest to set the effect in motion." He tapped the purple sphere, which pulsed brightly for a moment before shrinking slightly. "It's like the cost of activation; just like how you pay Focus and Stamina for your Allbright System Abilities. Continuous Energy Drain, on the other hand,"—he flicked his finger, and a smaller thread of light extended from the sphere, glowing faintly—"is the *ongoing* cost of maintaining the effect. It is automatically set to one one-hundredth of the Peak Energy Drain value, but can be increased after casting at will. It can, however, *not* be reduced."

Thea's eyes followed the thread, watching as it seemed to siphon energy from an unseen source. "So, the Continuous Drain just... keeps going as long as the effect is active? Won't you run out of Energy then, at some point?"

"Exactly. That's why most Psykers choose an initial Peak Energy Drain that does not exceed one-hundred times their natural regeneration; to maintain, at the very least, an equilibrium of Energy," the Rune priest said, nodding.

"Now, here's where *Polarities* come into play." He moved the white sphere closer to the white one, and as they neared, a shimmering thread of energy stretched from the purple sphere to the purple one. "When two opposing Polarities interact, the Energy you channel is partially cannibalized by your opponent's Power, if you cannot beat it outright. This cannibalized Energy is added to their Power's reserves, which feeds their Continuous Energy Drain."

Thea noticed how the shimmering thread seemed to form a smaller bubble of purple energy attached to the larger sphere, rather than gradually increasing the size of the sphere itself as she'd initially expected. The strange interaction deepened her intrigue, her brows furrowing as she tried to make sense of it.

"But... if I keep raising my energy to break through, won't I just keep feeding their illusion more and more?" she asked.

"Yes, you *will* feed it," the Rune priest confirmed, gesturing to the smaller purple bubble that pulsed faintly beside the larger sphere. He pointed to it. "This here represents the Continuous Energy Drain. Notice how it doesn't grow the larger sphere itself, but instead exists as its own reservoir of Energy, sustaining the effect. However,"—he tapped the larger sphere, which shimmered as if in response—"the Peak Energy Drain—the threshold you need to surpass to break the illusion—remains unchanged. This means that if you continue to increase your energy, you *will* eventually overpower the illusion."

Thea's eyes narrowed slightly as she studied the display. "But can't they just raise their energy too? Surely you're not locked into a single Peak Energy Drain value from the very start, right...?"

"They can," the Rune priest said, nodding as he waved his hand. A faint glow surrounded the larger purple sphere, mimicking an increase in its Peak Energy Drain. "But they can *only* adjust preemptively or after a failed attempt to counter you. You, as the attacker, *always* have the initiative. By the time they realize your energy has surpassed their threshold, their illusion will already be shattered, with no time for them to adjust."

With a flick of his wrist, the white sphere representing Thea's Veritas Inheritance moved toward the purple one. As they collided, the smaller bubble burst first, followed by the larger sphere imploding into a brief flash of light before vanishing entirely.

"See?" the Rune priest said, his tone steady and clear. "If your used Energy surpasses their Peak Energy Drain at any point, their Power collapses. No amount of adjustment on their part can stop it in real time."

Thea nodded slowly, her gaze lingering where the spheres had been, the explanation settling into place. “So... it’s all about outpacing them before they can react,” she murmured, her voice thoughtful.

“Exactly,” the Rune priest said with a pleased smile. He let the display dissolve with a wave of his hand. “Now, let’s take it a step further. Can you think of a way you could have done that in the situation you faced during the Assessment?”

Thea blinked, momentarily caught off guard by the sudden question. She tilted her head slightly, her mind working overtime as she tried to piece together an answer.

‘Nothing was actively hinting at the fact that there was an illusion,’ she thought. ‘There were none of the usual indicators—no glitches, no inconsistencies—so just saying I should’ve used more Energy wouldn’t make sense, right? That’s way too simple. The Rune priest wouldn’t be looking for that kind of answer...’

Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully as she glanced across the forest, her gaze settling on the burned-out husks of the trees. The Rune priest’s earlier explanation about Aura and its interaction with Auras-fire played back in her mind like a faint echo.

‘Everything has an Aura... Energy... Regeneration...’

Her thoughts suddenly collided, piling on top of each other as an idea began to crystallize.

It was as if a spark had ignited, coalescing into a realization that left her breathless.

The words of the faux-Thea from her strange visions resurfaced, clear and sharp: “Open your Gate wide if you want to understand what I was referring to...”

‘The Gate caps the regeneration of Psychic Energy, as well as making you harder to detect,’ She remembered learning from Zach, *‘so would throwing the Gate wide open also do the inverse? Make it easier to detect others?’*

She drew in a sharp breath as the pieces clicked into place.

‘That’s how I found the enemy Ace for Arrow Squad during the Assessment... Could it have worked the same way here? Like a super-powered radar ping that could have told me a Psyker was nearby...?’

“No...” Thea whispered, the word barely audible as a feeling of dread began to creep over her. Her mind turned over the implications, and horror gripped her chest as the realization deepened that faux-Thea might have been right all along.

Needing confirmation—or perhaps denial—she snapped her eyes back to the Rune priest, her voice trembling slightly as she asked, “What would’ve happened if I abruptly threw my Gate wide open, Rune priest? As wide as I could without overextending it?”

The Rune priest paused, his typically animated expression dimming as his gaze fixed on her with uncharacteristic seriousness. He seemed to sense the urgency in her question, and though he let the silence hang for a moment, he didn’t take long to respond.

"I'm not sure why my question has elicited this reaction from you," he began carefully, his tone even, "but I'll gladly answer yours—on one condition. Afterward, you'll tell me why you look like you've just seen a Void Daemon for the first time."

Thea nodded immediately, her movements almost frantic. She was desperate for answers, desperate to confirm—or deny—the gnawing suspicion that faux-Thea's words might have held a kernel of truth.

'If she was right... how? How could she have possibly known all of this when I didn't even know myself about any of this...?'

"If you had thrown your Gate wide open," the Rune priest began, "your footprint within the Void would have increased dramatically. The Gate acts as a regulator—it controls your connection to the Void and to other entities connected to it. Opening it abruptly and fully, like you're describing, would send massive ripples through the Void, affecting anything and anyone nearby who's similarly connected. In this case, that would include the *Obscuritas* Psyker."

He conjured a visual representation as he spoke, a small glowing sphere that pulsed faintly in the air before them. "Think of your Gate like this sphere," he said, gesturing toward it.

"When it's partially closed, the ripples it generates are faint, almost imperceptible." The sphere flickered softly, emitting only the faintest waves.

"But if you throw it wide open—" With a flick of his hand, the sphere burst open, radiating vivid ripples of light that cascaded outward in powerful waves.

"—*this* is what happens. The ripples would've swept through the area, and if the *Obscuritas* Psyker was anywhere nearby—and they *had* to be for their illusion to affect you in the way that they did—they would've been caught in the disturbance. Their position would've been immediately apparent to you. They couldn't have hidden from a detection pulse that intense, not while actively maintaining their illusion."

Thea's eyes widened as she watched the ripples dissipate into the air, her thoughts racing to match the Rune priest's words.

"But... couldn't they have closed their Gate to block it?" she asked, her voice uncertain. She remembered doing the same thing while facing the Psyker-duo together with Alpha Squad, to make them lose track of her in order to get the jump on them after-the-fact.

The Rune priest shook his head. "Not likely. To maintain their illusion, their Gate couldn't have been completely closed; remember the existence of the Continuous Energy Drain—it requires an active flow of energy, *all the time*. Without regenerating Psychic Energy through the Gate, they would have had to drop the Power fairly quickly. And while they might have had *some* shielding against Gate-based detection, it's incredibly unlikely that it could've withstood the sheer force of a sudden, wide-open burst like that. You would've realized instantly that another Psyker was close to you."

Thea felt as though a bucket of ice-cold water had been dumped over her head.

"*How...* did she know?" she muttered, her voice barely audible.

Her mind spun, unable to process how this could be possible.

Even with her precognitive senses, this felt *impossible*—this wasn't knowledge she'd possessed, so how could faux-Thea have specifically told her about this?

"How did *who* know? Talk to me, Thea. What's got you so scared?"

The Rune priest's voice cut through the haze in her mind like a blade. It seemed to echo unnaturally, resonating deeper than any normal voice should, and her gaze snapped to his.

"There... there was another *me*. During the Assessment. I... had a vision of sorts?" she began hesitantly, the words awkward as she tried to explain what had happened. The memory was vivid yet incomprehensible, like a puzzle with half the pieces missing.

"I remember reading about this in the Assessment report," the Rune priest said, nodding slowly. "Go on."

"I... she... it was like another version of me," Thea continued, her words faltering as she tried to articulate what had happened. "She told me this exact thing—about opening my Gate wide. She said it was the only way to understand why I was going to die if I didn't '*pay more attention*.' But... *How* could she have known, Rune priest? *I* didn't even know any of this until now, how could *she*?"

Her voice trailed off, uncertainty and confusion laced through every word.

The Rune priest hummed softly, cupping his chin thoughtfully before speaking again. "You *are* a precognitive Psyker, Thea. Visions, particularly of alternate versions of oneself, are not particularly uncommon among your kind. It's *entirely* possible that your subconscious mind made these connections without you fully realizing it."

Thea frowned, processing his words. "But... my visions are usually clearer than that. This one was so murky and... difficult to work with. Isn't Veritas supposed to get rid of all that...?"

"It is true that Veritas typically filters precognitive visions to align with clarity and Truth," the Rune priest said with a slow nod. "However, in high-stress situations, Powers can sometimes activate instinctively, without your full control and, at times, even without the colouring of your Inheritance. This could have been a *raw* precognition—an unfiltered glimpse of potential outcomes. Raw precognition lacks the benefits of Veritas' focus, which may explain why it seemed so chaotic and uncooperative. It's rare, but not unheard of."

Thea's expression darkened as she mulled this over. "Is that why she was so stand-offish and straight up hostile?" she asked, her tone uneasy.

The Rune priest's brows arched in surprise. "*Hostile*? Your vision was hostile to you? In what way?"

"She was... a bit of a bitch, I guess," Thea said, the memory prickling at her like an old wound. "She refused to answer my questions, demanded concessions, acted like I was

wasting her time. At first, I thought she might be the Call, but she was far too lucid for that. Then I thought she might be the Void itself, but she straight up told me how fucking stupid that was—in those exact words.”

The Rune priest’s lips twitched, but his curiosity was evident. “*Interesting*... Go on.”

“She acted like she wanted me to follow her advice, but her attitude made it completely impossible to trust her,” Thea said, frustration sharpening her voice. “If that was my subconscious... Why was it so uncooperative? It doesn’t make any sense, does it?”

The Rune priest leaned forward slightly, his thoughtful gaze drifting toward the husks of the trees his earlier Fireballs had reduced to ruins.

He tapped a finger against his chin, the silence stretching as he mulled over her question.

“Hmm...” he murmured at last. “I recall reading in the report about this incident that you mentioned having violet eyes instead of cyan during that moment, correct? You told your squad members as much?”

Thea nodded slowly, unsure where this was leading.

“This is generally indicative of Void energy flowing through a Psyker at dangerously high levels,” the Rune priest continued. “Violet eyes are one of the final stages of a Psyker Overload that can still be prevented. If that assumption *is* accurate, it could mean you accidentally tapped too far into your Gate while in a half-lucid state. Such a surge of Energy might have triggered your precognitive Powers uncontrollably, bypassing the usual influence of your Inheritance.”

He paused, his gaze sharpening as if piecing together a puzzle. “That could *also* explain the vision’s stand-offish nature. If you used such an enormous amount of Energy and opened your Gate *so wide*, it’s possible the Void itself influenced the vision as a whole. The hostility you experienced may have stemmed from that interference. It’s a convoluted explanation, I realize, but... it’s *one* possibility.”

The Rune priest trailed off, letting the silence stretch between them.

Thea sank into her thoughts, trying to process what he’d said, while he seemed equally absorbed in his own musings.

After a moment that felt like an eternity, he straightened slightly and spoke again, his voice calm but decisive. “Here’s what we’ll do: We’ll continue this lesson for now, but I’ll take this matter into consideration for our next session. There are a few alternate possibilities that *could* explain why these events unfolded as they did, but I can’t be certain of any of them right now. I’ll need access to some additional information I don’t currently have on hand, and that will take me a few hours to bring together. I apologize, as your mentor, for not having a sufficient answer for you immediately. I promise to have a more thorough explanation ready for our next lesson.”

He bowed his head ever so slightly in apology, the gesture so subtle yet unexpectedly formal that Thea almost panicked.

‘*Why is the **Rune**priest bowing to me?!*’ she thought, tension gripping her briefly.

She almost instinctively jumped up from her chair to do a deep, formal bow, as she had been taught by James all those years ago, but stopped herself just before the instinct could take hold. She remembered that she’d recently dealt with similar individuals that far, far outranked her, offering apologies that had not required any such formalities from her end without repercussions.

“I—It’s okay, Rune priest! Really!” she stammered, trying to keep her voice steady. “I... Thank you for the in-depth answer already. It lifts a massive weight off my mind...!”

Her hands clenched lightly in her lap as she continued to fight the instinct to bow in return, knowing the Rune priest clearly wasn’t the type to appreciate such formalities.

She let out a small breath of relief as the Rune priest’s faint, approving smile broke the tension.

“Very well. A promise it is,” he said. He took a few deliberate steps away from Thea, his hands clasped loosely behind his back. “Now, let us continue with the lesson, then. While your question about how you died at the end of the Assessment—and what you could have done to prevent it—has been addressed for now, if not all-too-encompassing, I believe we’ve landed on an important topic that deserves to be explored fully before moving on: *Inheritances*.”

With a smirk, he summoned the Inheritance Polarity Star once more, its points of light glimmering softly as it hovered in the air between them.

He extended a finger toward the very top point of the star, at the 12-o’clock position, where a gem of the purest crimson red shone like a drop of liquid fire.

“Let’s take it from the very top,” he said, his tone growing more animated, “and go through a full explanation of each Inheritance—what it stands for, what Psykers generally do with it, and what its *Polarity* is. Knowing how each Inheritance operates, how they interact, and the kinds of Powers a Psyker might wield with them is absolutely paramount if you want to become a true master of your craft as a Psyker...”