

Volume 2 - Chapter 91 - Voidrunes

PROF: *Lt. Korven*.

Looks tired. Probably gives this lecture 500 times a year.

OPENS WITH: "What is a Psyker, fundamentally?"

Says everyone gives a different answer. Says the right answer doesn't matter for our purposes. What matters is *what* they do and *how to survive* being near one. (~~great opener; I, too, would love to survive one day.~~)

Basics:

- Psyker = Person who channels Void energy through their Soul → reshapes reality (~~because why wouldn't they~~)
- Three things every Psyker has: **Inheritance** (the lens), **Path(s)** (where Powers come from), **Gate** (the channel)
- Gate is something everyone has. But only Psykers can perceive or open it. Open Gate = Psyfocus recovers, dangerous. Closed Gate = safe, no recovery.
- Every Psyker who has Delved eventually dies because of the Gate **(?!)**
- ~~How does that affect her? Can it be prevented?~~ not relevant rn

Awakening:

First major event for every Psyker. Triggered involuntarily when Resolve + Perception hit a threshold. Happens when the brain detects the Gate for the first time.

HE SAYS IT'S VERY, VERY DANGEROUS.

Most Psykers either close the Gate in time or get blown apart by their own first Power.

~~(Bit fucking late to tell us, isn't it?)~~

Awakening = ultra-charged version of their first combo. Whatever happens inside only becomes real if they fail to close the Gate (??? what the fuck does that even mean?)

→ ~~Is that what happened with her during the Assessment?~~ Yes, obviously you dumbass

Inheritances: Listed 12. Polarity pairs—opposing ones cancel at equal energy, cannibalize at uneven.

~~So which one is she again~~

Paths (a handful covered):

- Pyrokinesis (classic Battlefield Psyker choice)
- Telekinesis (sounds neat)
- Hemomancy (blood, gross—perfect for the Medic)
- Short-Term Precognition (definitely her)

- Telepathy (Corvus?)
- Barrier (Lucas?)

WIELDERS: Pre-Awakened Psykers.

Inheritance + One General Power + One Path Power early access.

Run on Focus until Psychic Attribute unlocks. Baseline 4.00+ Resolve.

→ ~~That's why she has so much Resolve!~~

Korven says most are nothing special, just at risk of Focus Overdraw.

The lucky ones hit hard early and level off by T1 Prime.

→ ~~Sure. Tell that to the fucking freaks she keeps murdering in the hundreds...~~

FIGHTING WITH PSYKERS:

- Treat like high-power weapons. Dangerous to everyone. With proper management = no risk.
- **Focus can substitute for Psyfocus** ← *important*
- → **Bring Focus Boosters from now on. Stock up!** (For her?).
- If they go down and you feel something weird, see something weird or hear something weird around them → **DO NOT touch them!!!**, likely mid-Gate-collapse. Wait for the Auxiliary medic or a Null!

Q from someone in row 7: "What's a Null?" (Great question!)

A: "Something like an anti-Psyker. Extremely rare individuals. Emanate a really uncanny aura, even just standing next to them. You almost certainly never encounter one."

~~Expecting at least two or three of these in the next Assessments, then.~~

Korven called me up. Asked me to describe Alpha Squad's encounter ratio with Psykers. Our stats are apparently **outrageous**. I kept it brief—the Assessment thing, the Rune priest in the corridor—only described that *that one* vaguely, pretended that it had been the Battlefield Ace from the Assessment, but figured it was good intel for the others—didn't mention the Rune priest.

Korven thanked me. Half the room stared at me when I sat back down.

Whatever.

FIGHTING AGAINST PSYKERS:

#1 RULE — RESOLVE. Resolve Resolve Resolve.

Resolve = Soul-toughness. Above a threshold = passive sphere of protection. 4–5 Resolve = 10–50x harder to affect than 2–3 (~~what the fuck, that's huge~~).

Trained Psykers can SHAPE it to cover others.

→ ~~IS THAT WHAT SHE WAS DOING WITH THE RUNEPRIEST?~~ Has to be.

#2 RULE — Have a Psyker on your team. (Check.)

High-Resolve Psyker buffers everyone nearby. → Another reason to keep her alive at all times... ~~and stocked with Focus Boosters?~~

#3 RULE — NULL SERUM.

T1 stim. Temporary Resolve booster. Tanks Stamina/Focus recovery and Ability clarity. Only deployed when Psyker engagement is unavoidable. Usually only Aces/Elite Squads carry it.

→ **Alpha Squad should be getting some, right???** Considering our actual encounter rate vs. what the lecture says is "average"? We should have crates of the damn stuff!

~~Should I ask Corvus~~ → **Ask Corvus about this!**

Closing comment from Korven: *"Most of you will go your entire careers without engaging a Psyker. Statistically, the only one you will ever stand next to is the one assigned to your own Faction. Please plan accordingly."*

→ Yeah no offense Lieutenant but I think Alpha Squad is gonna engage with more Psykers in our first six months than most companies see in five years... Just something in my gut telling me.

~~Don't write that down~~

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[Shortened Excerpt from, "Notes taken during initial Psychic 101 Lecture," Desmond Reimart, PFC 943]

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Still rattled by how easily the Rune priest had just... *agreed*, Thea simply stood there staring at the strange, eccentric man in front of her.

It was still hard to wrap her head around the fact that he hadn't even asked any follow-up questions about what, *exactly*, she wanted to talk about, who she wanted to talk with or anything of the sort.

He'd just gone "Yep, sure, sounds good. Moving on." and done it—just like that.

'But then again,' she reminded herself slowly, *'he really doesn't need to care about someone like me. Not in any meaningful "threat" sense.'*

Even if she had been a spy—even if she had every intention of using this directive for something *truly* terrible—there was nothing she could realistically do that would actually threaten the Rune priest, was there?

The Sovereign being unable to catch her in the act didn't mean she was *actually* free to act as she wanted. All it would take for him to punish her for any wrongdoing was a single *thought* on his part and she'd become undone at a level that even the System could not repair—of that, she had absolutely no doubt.

It felt particularly strange to have the sheer gulf in their respective power levels thrown so plainly into her face like this. Not as an insult, of course—just as a quiet, obvious *fact*.

He could afford to be generous *because* he could afford to be completely and utterly wrong.

But considering that his Presence was still putting a steady, baseline pressure on her that she had to actively resist at all times, the gap wasn't exactly *hard* to remember.

She took a few deep breaths to steady her hammering heart and try to push some of the adrenaline out of her system—the buildup toward that question had been carrying her for hours, and now that it was done, her body was scrambling to figure out what to do with all the leftover energy.

Her eyes met the Rune priest's, who was watching her patiently, waiting for her to get herself together.

"Alright. I'm ready. Where do we start?"

The Rune priest cupped his beardless chin, fingers stroking lightly along the jawline. *"Hmm... How about we split this session up? Half-and-half, or so?"*

He nodded to himself.

"Yes. That sounds quite good. Let's do *exactly* that."

He turned his full attention back to her.

"First half—you ask me the questions. Anything you want to know about being a Psyker, anything you've been wondering about in relation to it, your Powers, the System, the Void, whatever you have on your mind! Second half, I ask you the questions that have come up during my research into your particular case—assuming they haven't already been answered in the first half."

He spread his hands lightly. "Does that sound good?"

Thea was a little taken aback at being consulted on the structure of the lesson—she was the student here, after all—but she'd more or less gotten used to the Rune priest's particular brand of *strange* again over the last few minutes, so she recovered quickly and nodded.

"Sure. Sounds good."

A smile spread across his face, then flickered into something closer to a small scowl. "Huh... We will definitely need the seats again, then."

With a simple wave of his hand, the cushioned armchair he'd been lounging on at the start drifted back across the room toward him, while a second one materialized just behind Thea.

"There. *Much* better. If we are just going to talk, we might as well be comfortable, right? *And* if we need any practical demonstrations later, I can always get rid of them again."

Thea sat down, trying to figure out where to even begin. There were *so many* questions piled up inside her head that it was hard to sort through them cleanly.

*'Where do I even start? I've got like a **thousand** questions about all this! And most of them, I can't ask, because they involve Æht... Not going to reveal her yet. Not until I've talked to Kara first.'*

She turned it over for a few seconds, then decided to just go with whatever surfaced first—which ended up being her newest Psychic experience, from just a few minutes ago.

"So... when I was trying to use [Glimpse] earlier, you mentioned something about *charting a pathway*. What does that actually mean? Like, fundamentally—what am I actually doing when I do this? I can feel that I'm pushing Psyfocus through... *something*. The pathways, I guess. But what determines the pathway? I've used the Power before, plenty of times, and I've never had to do any of this. Why is it suddenly different?"

She had been a bit worried about asking that—essentially admitting, out loud, that she'd been using her Powers without any of the proper foundation. But given how nonchalantly the Rune priest had treated that fact earlier, she wanted to get a better read on *why* it hadn't seemed to confuse him at all, as well as what it was that she was actually doing.

She was grateful for that fact, obviously.

It made keeping Æht hidden *a lot* easier when the Rune priest didn't ask the obvious follow-up questions about *how* she'd been using Powers that Æht had clearly been helping her with this entire time.

But it was still fairly odd.

And fundamentally understanding *how* something worked—she'd learned over many years inside the Golden Age Arcade—was oftentimes even more important than simply getting it to work.

The Rune priest cupped his chin again, thinking for a moment, before he leaned forward slightly in the armchair and tilted his head.

"Tell me first—what did it *feel* like you were doing? Exactly. In your own words."

Thea blinked at him for a few moments, not having expected the counter-question.

"It felt like..." She paused, trying to find the right shape for it. "Like I was trying to fill a channel with water. No—Not quite a channel. More like a dried riverbed of sorts? There were these *paths* that already existed inside of me—I could feel them, *kind of*—and they needed filling. But I couldn't *actually* see or follow them. No matter how hard I tried to look at them directly."

The Rune priest nodded sagely.

"And were they *all* inside of you?"

Thea opened her mouth to say "*yes, obviously*"—then stopped.

She thought back to the dozen-upon-dozen of attempts, sifting through the memory of each one. The grooves, the way the Psyfocus had *wanted* to move, the directions she'd let it travel before her throat had detonated.

She frowned.

"...No," she said slowly. "Not all of them. Some were going in... *weird* directions. Directions I'm actually struggling to name, now that I'm thinking about it." Her brow furrowed deeper. "While I was working on it, I wasn't really paying attention to *where* I was pushing the energy. Just that I was. But now, looking back..."

She trailed off, trying to call up a clear picture of the path she'd been mapping, and finding that she simply couldn't.

"I could repeat the motion, I think," she said carefully. "I could do it again, if you asked me to. But if you handed me a stylus and told me to draw the path out, I don't think I could... I can remember *doing* it, but I can't actually *visualize* the route I took..."

The Rune priest nodded once more—the same patient nod as before.

"And why do you think that is?"

Thea went quiet.

'Why is that?'

She turned the question over. Looked at it from the angles she had.

Directions she couldn't describe. A path she could repeat but couldn't draw.

Some of it felt like it had moved further *into* her—which made sense, sort of, you could push energy inward—but some of it had also moved further *away* from her; outward. And some of it had even looped, twisted back on itself in ways that, in hindsight, made *absolutely* no sense at all.

*'That shouldn't even be possible... A path like that can't loop in on itself in that way. That's not how channels work... That's not how **anything** works. If you're filling a channel, the channel has a start and an end. It doesn't double back through itself, otherwise it just ends*

up spilling into the different pathways—it won't have a clear beginning nor end... And yet I distinctly remember it doing exactly that.'

She tried harder.

Pushed her memory of the sensation against every framework she had—fluid mechanics, electrical circuits, even some of her newly acquired physics knowledge, *anything* that involved some form of energy flowing through a defined route.

'None of this fits... Like at all.'

She frowned harder, trying to chase that thought, but it slipped sideways every time she got close to it. Like the answer was *right there*, yet she couldn't quite force her brain into the angle it needed.

She let out a slow breath.

"I don't know," she finally admitted. "All I know is that it didn't *feel* quite right. I can't wrap my head around it. The directions don't fit into anything I can describe."

The Runepriest's face split into a white-toothed grin and he pointed at her with both hands at once, the gesture theatrical enough that the void-black robes chimed.

"*Exactly* right, my dear pupil! *Exactly* right!"

Thea blinked.

"That... is the correct answer?"

"It does *not* make any logical sense," he confirmed, nodding profusely, the grin still firmly in place. "Yes. *Precisely*. You have already identified the problem—you simply have not been told what the problem actually *is* yet."

He let that sit for a few seconds.

Long enough that Thea started to wonder, again, whether he was actually going to answer her question or whether this was just going to be him agreeing with her in increasingly enthusiastic ways while not explaining anything for the whole session.

Then, finally, he thankfully continued.

"The reason none of it makes logical sense, Thea, is because what you are attempting to envision—what you have been trying to chart inside of yourself this entire session—is a *four-dimensional structure*."

Thea's eyes went wide.

"What you are creating, fundamentally," he said, his voice taking on the cadence she'd come to recognize as his personal Lecture Mode, "is a *Voidrune*. Voidrunes are the fundamental language of the Void itself; or rather, how we, inside the Material Plane, can influence the Void. They are how Psykers interact with Psyfocus—which is the colloquial term for the

energy that flows from the Void into our reality—and shape it into doing what we intend. Every Power—every manifestation of Psychic Intent and Will—it all comes back to Voidrunes, at the deepest level. The pathway you have been struggling to carve is, ultimately, the image and form of a Voidrune. The end goal of the channel is creating the rune itself and powering it via your Psyfocus."

He spread his hands slightly.

"Which raises a rather interesting question, doesn't it?"

He leaned back into the armchair. The cushion underneath him sighed softly at the movement. His eyes settled on hers, sharp and amused and very, very focused.

"Where, *exactly*, are you carving the Voidrune?"

Thea sat briefly with the question.

'Where am I carving it?'

She turned it over.

The Voidrune was supposed to be *persistent*—that was implied by everything the Rune priest had said. It needed to be something that would stay with her for basically forever.

Something that also couldn't be accessed by anyone else, because no two Psykers would share the same Voidrunes, otherwise they could simply be handed off—and then Psykers wouldn't be as rare as they were.

And it had to be something that persisted unconsciously, because she'd been feeling the grooves of it earlier despite Æht not being around—pathways that *already* existed even when Æht wasn't actively shaping them in the moment.

It wasn't her body, because bodies changed. She'd gotten reset so many times that none of the channels would have possibly survived.

It couldn't be her mind in any conscious sense either, because Æht did not share the same memories as she did, from everything she could tell.

There was really only *one* thing left that made sense.

"It's the *Soul*," she said slowly. "Isn't it? I'm carving it into my Soul."

The Rune priest nodded easily.

"It is indeed the Soul. Each Voidrune engraved into your Soul is *permanently* carved there. You will have it for as long as your Soul exists. Activation of the Power then simply requires you to conjure up the image of the Voidrune as a whole, the Psyfocus will then follow the channels that it's composed of. Which, trust me on this, is far, far easier than trying to actually chart the Voidrune itself. The *whole* is infinitely easier to hold in mind than the parts."

Thea tilted her head slightly.

"So your rank," she said carefully, "*Runepriest*. That actually has something to do with Voidrunes, then? Or is that just coincidence?"

He chuckled at that and nodded, the grin returning to the corner of his mouth.

"It has *quite* a lot to do with it, yes. To bear the title of Runepriest, one must have carved a minimum number of Voidrunes into their Soul. The exact number is not something I will be discussing—but suffice to say, the title is, fundamentally, proof of one's mastery over the Powers of the Void itself."

Thea filed that one away for later.

Her mind had snagged on something during his previous answer, however, that she definitely wanted cleared up.

"You said that the Voidrune persists as long as I have a Soul. But... What happens if the Soul gets damaged? That's possible, right? Can the Voidrunes be damaged alongside it?"

"Yes," he said simply. "It is possible. There are, in fact, a surprising number of things in this universe that can damage a Soul—and the higher you climb, the more of them become imminently relevant to you. Once you become *interesting* enough for the true powers of this universe to take notice of your existence, the list grows considerably faster than most Psykers are comfortable with."

He let that sit for a beat, looking slightly annoyed at the prospect, before schooling his own face again into a neutral one.

"And yes. When the Soul is damaged, the Voidrunes carved into it are damaged alongside it. They can be broken—shattered, even. Simply bent out of shape. Or erased entirely, if the damage is severe enough."

Thea's stomach tightened slightly.

"I, personally," the Runepriest continued, "have had to rechart and recarve several dozen Voidrunes over the centuries. It is..."

He paused for a fraction of a second longer than usual. But Thea caught it.

"...an *extremely* unpleasant experience," he finished.

His face had shifted, just barely. The corner of his mouth had pulled down at the memory, his eyes taking on the same distant quality the Old Man's eyes had sometimes done when he had thought about things from long before her time.

Just as quickly as it had appeared, however, it was gone, smoothed over, back to the usual amused composure.

Thea winced inwardly anyway.

'For someone like him to say it was "extremely unpleasant"—and to actually have that show on his face, even for a second...'

She didn't want to think about what that truly meant in *practical* terms for the experience as a whole. Anything that pulled a visible reaction out of someone like the Rune priest from sheer memory *alone* was probably not something a person could realistically prepare for.

She moved on, trying not to dwell on it.

"You've been using two different words during this," she said. "Charting and carving. I've been treating them as basically the same thing. What's the actual difference?"

"Ah. That is a fairly simple one." His usual ease returned in full. "Charting is the act of figuring out what the Voidrune actually looks like. Mapping its shape. Understanding its geometry, its angles, its full structure across all four dimensions. Carving, then, is the act of *actually* engraving it into your Soul, once you know what it looks like."

He shifted slightly in the armchair, getting comfortable for what was clearly going to be a longer answer.

"Every Psyker starts out doing both at once—just as you were doing earlier today. Most Psykers, in fact, never learn to do anything else or even realize there's other options—the other options aren't exactly taught. They simply repeat the same process they were taught in their very first psychic classes, for the rest of their careers, charting and carving simultaneously, taking the deaths and the backlashes as the price of progress."

He tilted his head.

"But there *are* other techniques. Other approaches that allow for a different order of operations."

He held up one finger.

"The first—and the safest, by a *significant* margin—is *charting* the whole Voidrune first, in its entirety, before ever even attempting to carve it. This removes a lot of the danger of mishaps like the ones you experienced earlier. You map the structure fully, understand it completely, and only *then* begin the actual carving process. The carving becomes a much more controlled operation, because you already know *exactly* what you are aiming for."

He raised an eyebrow.

"This is the method that should, in my opinion, be taught to every Psyker as the *default*. The problem is that it is also the *slowest* method of all, by a fairly significant margin—and the military, as you may have noticed, is far more interested in results delivered *quickly* than in results delivered *safely*. *Especially* during wartime, when several opposing Factions are putting their own Psykers through faster, dirtier methods to get them combat-ready ahead of schedule."

He waved a hand vaguely.

"The DDS, *of course*, mitigates most of the actual danger here. With a proper environment, like here aboard the Sovereign, the deaths during the brute-force method are functionally cost-free—an unpleasant experience, certainly, but not a permanent one. So, for the UHF and all other Factions with access to the DDS—which are basically all of them, by now, the equation shifts. Faster method, with mishaps absorbed by the DDS, easily beats slower method with no mishaps but considerably more time spent. Hence why most modern Psyker training defaults back to the simultaneous chart-and-carve approach you experienced earlier."

He sighed slightly, shaking his head.

"But *that* is contingent on the DDS being *available*. And not every Psyker, at every stage of their career, has reliable access to one. You might be deployed for months at a time in a sector with no DDS infrastructure—like any Battlefield, really. You might be on a vessel where the DDS is reserved for other operational priorities. You might even find yourself in *political* circumstances where requesting DDS time would draw attention you would rather not draw. In *all* of those cases, the safe method suddenly becomes the *only* sensible method—and yet most Psykers never actually learn it, because their initial training never included it."

He let that sit for a moment, then raised a second finger.

"The other technique goes in the opposite direction. It is *the most* dangerous approach I have ever encountered—and one I will, *very explicitly*, never recommend to you or to anyone else. Ever."

He met her eyes directly.

"Carving *before* charting."

Thea blinked.

"Carving... before knowing what the Voidrune even looks like?"

"Yep." He nodded slowly. "It is, fundamentally, brute-forcing a Power. You commit to engraving something before you understand *what* you are engraving, and you practically guarantee a mishap. But—and this is the part that makes it dangerous in a *very specific* way—the mishap *itself* becomes the data you are searching for."

He spread his hands lightly.

"Are you familiar with how the field of particle physics is explored, on a practical, experimental level?"

Thea shook her head. "Vaguely... Some of it was covered during my Basic Physics Skill Training. They essentially smash particles together at high speeds and look at what comes out of it, then try to deduce what was inside or got created by the collision, based on the fragments."

"This is *exactly* the same principle." He nodded approvingly. "You forcibly create a mishap. You observe how the mishap manifests in real-space—the shape of the failure, the geometry of the backlash, the direction of the eruption, all of it. And from that observation, you reverse-engineer the Voidrune. Or, more accurately, the Voidrunes. Plural."

Thea's eyebrows climbed.

"Plural?"

"*Plural.*" The Rune priest's tone shifted, deepening slightly. "Despite what most Psykers will assume—and what the standard curriculum will teach you—Delving is *not* the only way to unlock new Voidrunes. Mishaps are another. A much, much rarer one, infinitely more dangerous one, and *much* less reliable one. But yes. Plural. A single deliberately created mishap, properly observed and properly studied, can sometimes reveal *multiple* runes in a single attempt."

He shook his head slowly, the small frown returning to his face.

"I have used this technique *exactly once* in my entire career. Just once. And I will never use it again. The cost was simply too high for what it returned, and the dangers were *far* too significant to justify the gains."

His eyes settled on hers again.

"The *only* Psykers I know of, personally, who have lived long enough to make consistent use of this method and produce genuine results from it... are Rune priest Zamir, and the current Voidspeaker."

She nodded slowly, letting the answer settle.

Her eyebrows had crept up at some point during his explanation, though, and she didn't quite manage to lower them all the way back down.

Out of everything he'd said in the last few minutes, the part that had genuinely caught her off guard wasn't the existence of the brute-force method, or the danger of it, or even the names at the end. It was the fact that the Rune priest—a man whose very *Presence* she could feel actively pressing against her even now, even pulled all the way back as far as he could—had openly admitted that the technique was too dangerous for *him* to keep pursuing.

Her mouth had opened a fraction of a centimeter at some point without her noticing.

She closed it.

If the Rune priest had noticed, he gave no sign of it. He simply waited, watching her with that same patient attentiveness he always gave her, giving her the time she needed to actually process the answer rather than rushing her toward the next question.

When she finally lifted her eyes back to his, she turned her next question over for a few seconds first—trying to figure out the cleanest way to ask it without giving away too much.

"So... why exactly do I need to chart and carve the Voidrune, if I've already been using the Power? I don't really understand *why* I'm doing this part. If the Power can be used without carving the rune first—because I've *clearly* been doing exactly that—then why carve it at all?"

That earned her a dry chuckle and a slight shake of the Rune priest's head, as if he couldn't quite believe what he was hearing.

"Thea. My dearest pupil... That is not the norm at all."

He leaned forward slightly in the armchair.

"There are *some* Psykers—like yourself—who have what could best be described as an instinctual understanding of their first Powers. They can use them without doing the actual legwork of charting and carving the Voidrune first. It is something that's *significantly* more common among Wielders than full Psykers, mind you, but the exact reasons are not fully understood, even now."

He waved a hand vaguely.

"Personally, I believe it has to do with Void Aptitude. Effectively—how well your mind and Soul are naturally aligned with the Void as a whole. How easily they can be molded and shaped around the fundamental *otherness* of it. The higher your Aptitude, the easier it becomes to brush up against Powers without the foundational work being in place first."

He met her eyes again.

"But the answer to *why* you actually need to do this work—why *instinctual use* is not sufficient on its own—you have already answered yourself, my dear pupil. Earlier today, in fact."

Thea blinked.

She thought back, running through the morning. The training hall. The anxiety. The leadup to the question itself, the dying—

'Oh.'

It clicked into place almost immediately.

"Because if I don't have the Voidrune carved," she said slowly, "I can't actually *shape* the Power with my own Intent and Will. I can *only* use it instinctively. I can influence the outcome a little bit—here and there—but *only* within the bounds of whatever the instinct already covers... Something like speech-precognition—what I tried earlier—isn't part of that instinctual baseline. And without the Voidrune in place, I have no framework to shape my Intent or Will into something that *fits* what speech-precognition would actually require."

The Rune priest slowly nodded once, visibly satisfied.

"Very good, Thea. Very good indeed..."