

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 456 - Fluid Master

In another village, well to the east of Jake and his companions, two hooded individuals emerged from the shadows. The sun was about to set again and their appearance went unnoticed. Except for one person.

‘Inquisitors, to what do we owe the honor of your humble visit?’ A striking Eskimo-looking woman took aim at them with the scepter in her hands.

The object was carved from a human femur and ended with a tiny human baby skull stuffed into the mouth of a carved snake. If Jake had been present, he would have recognized the scepter the Fluid Ghost had reported seeing tattooed on his murderer’s arm, except that here it was no longer a tattoo but a genuine one.

The woman was still young, with a malignant look and a pierced nose, while an ugly scar scarred her lower lip all the way down her chin. Her curves and charms were hidden under the multiple layers of fur covering her. It was as if she was gearing up for another ice age. Anyone else would have sweated profusely in her place.

‘Tootega... You know why we’re here.’ One of the Inquisitors growled menacingly.

This one was particularly tall and muscular compared to his peers. Unlike the other Inquisitors, his body filled out his cloak. Unlike Oxium and Ilfora, his body was very much alive.

‘Who would have thought Isbeus would send the great Kagorim himself.’ Tootega jeered without getting daunted. ‘Is it Keelut you seek? Follow me.’

The Inuit woman nimbly led them to a shack away from the decaying Village. In this Village, there were no more Lords, but some buildings had been preserved.

The hut she stopped at was dingy, as if the wood in it was rotten and moth-eaten. Maggots swarmed everywhere, seeping into every pore of the decaying wood. But Tootega showed no disgust as she banged on the door.

Knock, knock.

‘Keelut, you have a visitor.’ She barked tersely before stopping the two Inquisitors as she pressed her scepter against the first one’s chest. ‘Remember, at the slightest sign, the truce is broken.’

Kagorim snorted, then pushed the scepter away with a flick of his hand. The second Inquisitor remained silent throughout.

‘Enter.’

Once inside, they were greeted by a subdued atmosphere whose only light was derived from the multiple candles laying on the floor. A smell of dried blood and fresh meat filled the place. As they passed through the door, a cracking sound was heard under their feet and they discovered small bones crushed under their soles. Looking around, they found that the floor was littered with skeletal remains.

The one they were looking for was sitting cross-legged in the center of the room in the middle of a pentagram painted with animal blood. In contrast to Tootega, he was shirtless and wearing only his pants

and fur boots. His head was shaved on the sides and his long hair on top was pulled back and tied in a knot.

With eyes closed, he was knitting something vaguely humanoid, fiddling with a thick, whitish yarn of dubious origin.

The two Inquisitors waited patiently for him to finish his craft, then at last seeming to notice their presence Keelut opened his eyes and smiled. His white eyes had no irises and evoked an unspeakable wickedness.

‘How is Grandmaster Isbeus?’ He asked politely. ‘Is she still dreaming of dominating the universe? Is the Consortium not enough for her anymore?’

Kagarim slammed his fist into the worm-eaten door and it imploded on the spot.

‘Don’t play with me. Isbeus tolerates you because you are useful... Keep it that way.’

Keelut raised an eyebrow, but kept his sardonic smile.

‘Very well. What do you want? Who is the poor fool I have to curse?’

‘I prefer that.’ Kagarim grunted.

The Inquisitor nodded to his comrade and the latter lifted his hand to materialize a mini transparent barrier. On it, traces of blood and fresh brains were spread out.

Faced with such a sample, Keelut’s eyes widened with surprise. Despite his apparent calm, he was undoubtedly excited.

‘I understand better why you came to see me...’ The Eskimo Player burst out laughing, then bit his lower lip to the blood to curb his

rapture. 'If this guy is still alive after blowing his brains out, I guess he's worth my time. He'll make an excellent guinea pig.'

'We don't want a guinea pig. We want him dead.' Kagarim reminded him coldly.

Iermzare ovu ovzufo, Kuuipo zfr val dareuz msuz ovu gfzzauz frt
ovmpevodpiiw hvujut ovu nauhu md gzfar vu vft nahcut pn mr ao.
Cmrouqnifoare lmquovare, vu nzmqalut,

'He will die. But remember, I am not infallible. My curses have many restrictions.'

'We know that.' The Inquisitor said. 'I don't trust your otherworldly magic, but Isbeus seems to hold it in high regard.'

'Last question?' Keelut queried with earnest curiosity. 'Why don't you kill him yourself? By the looks of it, you've already succeeded once.'

Kagarim fathomed the Eskimo's white eyes ominously, before retorting,

'You know why.'

'I see... The Curse will be in effect tomorrow morning. How long he survives once it is activated will depend on his abilities. But either way, I doubt he'll have any time to spare after that.'

'Perfect. That's what we want.' Kagarim patted his shoulder twice and the Eskimo's knees almost buckled.

The two Inquisitors were then escorted to the entrance of the Village by Tootega and two other Inuit armed with spears. From beginning to end, the Inquisitor accompanying Kagarim spoke no words, but when

it snapped its fingers once out of sight a veil of dark energy enveloped them and they vanished.

‘How do I do it?’ Jake appealed to the Old Ghost’s knowledge to break through the Fluid Master threshold.

‘I’ve never reached that level in my life, but it shouldn’t be too different from Fluid Adept.’ The Fluid Ghost confessed. ‘Merge your consciousness with your Fluid Core and tap into your Fluid Card to absorb the Fluid. It gets tougher once you reach the status of Fluid Master. Epiphanies and insights are needed and I don’t know if the Fluid in this Card has that potential. Usually one must connect to the Fluid fabric tying the entire Universe together and ‘listen’ until an enlightenment, a profound change in the Soul occurs. The precognition, the innate Fluid mastery of the Fluid Wielders comes from the infinite knowledge and data contained in the meandering Fluid. No one knows what they will find and what ability they will acquire until they have their epiphany. The current consensus is that our *désirs* greatly influence this transformation.

Jake suppressed a grunt.

‘I don’t know if this pure Fluid has all this knowledge and information to offer, but I doubt it.’ He sighed. ‘We’ll figure it out as we go along.’

Lighting a fire in his hearth, he sat down inside and closed his eyes. Already briefed, his consciousness reached out to his Fluid Card and with a thought began to draw in the Fluid. The Fluid counter on his Fluid Card began to decrease first by a few points per second, then quickly by hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands at a time.

From a fragile stream, a tumultuous river of Fluid soon gushed forth, and all that Fluid poured with unparalleled violence into his Fluid Core, which compared to this was a tiny, insignificant organ.

It didn't take long for his apricot kernel-sized Fluid Core to slowly start growing again. He was already close to the level of a Peak Fluid Adept, and it only took a little push to break through this barrier. Still, there was a reason why this hurdle stopped 90% of the Fluid Wielders.

Since a Fluid Adept had a nearly human body, he had to feed his Fluid Core gradually and could only boost his organs by mobilizing the Fluid under his control, an ability that depended heavily on their mental strength. This was extremely grueling and required long recovery breaks.

With his Myrtharian Body, Spirit Body and new True Will point, Jake overcame all these pitfalls.

His Fluid Core, infused with a flood of Fluid, soon reached its full capacity and began to crack. Already familiar with the incident, Jake mobilized his Bloodline, Constitution and Vitality Aether to contain the damage.

Tjm vmpzl ifouz, fdouz val Fipat Cmzu vft dzfhopzut frt ovur zueuruzfout f hmpniu vprtzut oaql, ovu mzefer guhfqu hmqniuouiw mnfyphu iacu f gifhc vmiu frt lomnnut fglmzgere uruzew. A duj luhmrtl ifouz, ovu Fipat Cmzu guefr om emggiu pn Fipat fefar, oval oaqu lusuzfi qaiiamr praol ar f vufzogufu.

The stagnant organ the size of an apricot pit suddenly doubled in size and Jake's mind experienced a massive expansion of his senses. His perception of the world was heightened, amplified many times over, and at that moment, all sorts of information entered his brain.

The Fluid running through his meridians and feeding his cells formed a deep connection for the first time and a kind of link with his Aether Code was established. With this new knowledge, Jake immediately knew how to use the Fluid to strengthen his body.

Opening his eyes, the membrane of his cells began to vibrate, swelling and deflating at a very high frequency as if they had finally learned to breathe and the Fluid and Aether clumped around it was finally allowed in.

As if his cells had always been hungry, they began to greedily devour all that energy with even more zest than when he was snoozing in that ocean of green lava.

As his cells vibrated faster and faster, they suddenly began to rub against each other and this friction quickly raised his body temperature to several thousand degrees. The Aether and the Fluid within it subtly changed its nature and a mysterious and irreversible transformation took place within him.