

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 479 - Betrayals

At the same time, the participants who had survived the space station's flipping were slowly paying the price for the Corruption's rapid spread.

The deadly battle between Sigmar's allies and those of Minerva and Nylreg was not limited to just these three Fluid Grandmasters, and the conflict had already escalated to the point where the lines between allies and enemies had become extremely blurred.

With the Purgatory deactivated, the confrontations were now taking place in narrow corridors and rooms damaged by the previous explosions, and the risk of dying from collapses, falls or electrocution had become substantial.

When the surge of corrupted Fluid engulfed the corridors and rooms where these multiple skirmishes took place, that blurred boundary between ally and enemy melted together to only leave foes in sight.

One might have assumed that the mazelike network of hallways would have slowed the propagation of this tidal wave of impure energy, but it could not be impeded by any wall or obstacle. Instead, it was the survivors trying to flee who saw their escape hampered, and many were caught before the rearmost Players realized that something was wrong.

In one of these rooms, a clash of exceptional destructiveness was raging between six Inquisitors. The temperature was excruciating,

and arcs of purple lightning flashed regularly, threatening to electrocute any passerby to death.

Their armor and cloak had long since been destroyed by the sheer savagery of their battle, and their true appearances were now revealed, both nightmarish and fascinating.

In a configuration very similar to that of Sigmar facing Minerva and Nylreg, 2 Inquisitors were struggling to resist the other 4 and were in very bad shape. Unlike Sigmar, who was playing his cards close to his chest and whose wounds were only feigned, Ilfora and Crodores were already mortally wounded.

Ilfora had the figure and features of a beautiful young woman, save that her body was nothing but energy and light. As real as a hologram, the faint radiance she gave off hinted at her imminent demise.

Crodores had a gaseous state similar to the deceased Oxium, but instead of being composed simply of air, his body was uniquely filled with oxygen. Although he was not in as critical a condition as his comrade Ilfora, the bunch of gas that made him up had shrunk down to the size of a 10cm human.

Across the way, Kagorim and Imaev, the two most powerful Inquisitors under Minerva's command, looked down on them with arrogance and disdain, preparing to deliver the fatal blow. The two remaining Inquisitors stood beside them, one looking like a giant of flame, while the other looked more like a black wraith clutching a huge cleaver.

'Give up.' Kagorim said impassively as he walked towards them. The metal floor sank several centimeters, creaking with each step, threatening to give way at any moment.

Like his colleague Imaev, these two Inquisitors had a human appearance and therefore could not really be considered failures. Why they had taken on the mantle of Inquisitors remained a mystery.

Kfemzaq jfl f ofii, qplhpifz qfr jaov imre vfaz frt f lvmzo gufzt. Huggmzu ovu fnnufzfrhu md f Nmztah gfzgfzafr, frt val lear uqaoout f dfaro emitur lvaqquz ovfo qftu vaq immc iacu f vmiw vuzm. Fmz daevoare, vu jauitut f vufsw ezufoljmtz.

Imaev was even more striking, as he was the only Inquisitor among the 6 still wearing his armor. It was still intact, as if neither electricity nor flames could damage it.

Seeing Kagorim walking arrogantly towards them, Ilfora and Crodores maintained their resolute expression, their loyalty to Sigmar seemingly unshaken.

‘I won’t say it a third time. Give it up. You are not our target.’ Kagorim said again as he laid the tip of his greatsword against Ilfora’s throat.

At the mere touch of the greatsword, Ilfora’s holographic apparition became unstable, ready to disperse at a moment’s notice. The energy and light in her body slowly transferred to the sword, quickly draining it of all its life force. Despite its ordinary appearance, this weapon was an authentic Fluid Master Artifact.

‘Never.’ Ilfora closed her eyes with resignation. ‘Kill me.’

‘As you wi-’

Kagorim paused abruptly as he received a message from his superior. Imaev also stiffened, as did the other four Inquisitors present. Ilfora opened her eyes in surprise, but Crodores next to her subtly moved away.

The giant flame-like Inquisitor floated over to Kagorim and vociferated harshly,

‘What are you waiting for?! Nylreg has given us new orders. Minerva wouldn’t consider betraying us, would she?’

Kagorim’s facial muscles twitched, but his only response was... to cleave the flame giant in half with his sword. A good portion of his flames were absorbed by the sword and a scream of rage shook the corridors and walls already greatly weakened by their battle. When the flame giant reformed a little further away, it was distinctly smaller.

‘What does that mean, Kagorim?’ The black wraith holding the cleaver asked darkly. ‘Is it Minerva betraying us or your own decision?’

At that moment, a cruel, soulless spark flashed fleetingly in Imaev’s eyes as he stood at the side of the warrior faithfully carrying out Minerva’s orders.

‘You know very well why, Qizor.’ Kagorim replied coldly as he stepped in front of Ilfora and Crodores to protect them. ‘You lied to us. You never intended to keep your end of the bargain. So it’s only natural that we won’t honor ours.’

‘Haha, hahaha, HAHA...’

A spine-chilling evil guffaw suddenly erupted from the Wraith Inquisitor’s mouth, his cleaver repeatedly clattering to the floor from his sloppy grip. When Qizor regained his composure, a frosty, supercilious expression settled over his face.

Kagorim immediately sensed that something was wrong.

‘Kill him.’

And not kill them. With his alertness, Kagorim noted the subtle difference.

Despite his premonitory powers, Kagorim did not escape his doom. A familiar looking hand shot through his back, then sprang out of his chest with a golden heart in it. Spitting out a mist of blood, the warrior turned his head a full 180 degrees and recognized his longtime friend and comrade.

‘Why?’ He asked emotionlessly to Imaev. ‘What did they promise you?’

Imaev remained silent and withdrew his arm covered with golden blood and disinterestedly threw his friend’s heart on the ground, then crushed it with his foot as if it were an expired fruit. Only then, he answered, removing his visor helmet. A foreign, youthful face smiled at him with a trace of pity.

‘You got it all wrong. I was never on your side. The Imaev you know is long dead. My real name is Ethlando.’

‘Ethlando...’ Kagorim murmured with puzzlement before his eyes widened in understanding. ‘Sigmar’s former second in command! You’re one of the traitors who came to negotiate a deal with Minerva on behalf of Nylreg.’

‘Even in agony, you remain calm.’ Ethlando nodded appreciatively.

‘But you’re still wrong. Look around you.’

Crodores, the tiny human formed of oxygen who looked like he was about to be consumed, suddenly swelled up and like a slime he swallowed both Kagorim and Ilfora with no regard for his ally.

‘Oxygen is not just an atom or a gas. What I control is not either the dihydrogen that allows us to breathe, nor the ozone that allows the

atmosphere to absorb the cosmic radiations harmful to the life...‘
Crodores, who had been rather quiet and discreet until now, suddenly began to prattle on passionately.

‘To control oxygen is to control life and that is why I am taking this form. Whether your body is invincible and immortal, or intangible and made of light, it makes no difference to me. Because what I really am is that primordial thing that you need to stay alive. I am what you breathe and I have full control over that concept.’

As if to back up his point, Ilfora’s intangible body began to dim rapidly and she started to squirm as if she were suffocating. Kagorim, on the other hand, showed no signs of suffocation, but the golden halo surrounding him grew thinner and his skin became dull and cracked. At this sight, the warrior showed a much greater shock than when his longtime friend had ripped out his heart.

‘So, it was from the beginning 1 versus 5, and only now 2 versus 4.’ Kagorim realized with a disillusioned frown, as he glared at the 4 Inquisitors staring at him numbly. ‘I guess the death of Oxium and Croyorn was no accident. If I remember correctly, it was you Imaev who gave them the order to attack this Village a second time.’

‘Ethlando, not Imaev.’ The traitor corrected him laconically. ‘You were a good friend all these years, but your personality is too inflexible. That’s why you failed your ascension to the rank of Fluid Grandmaster.’

At that moment, a huge aura burst out of Ethlando, not so different from Minerva or Sigmar. With a dispirited laugh, Kagorim realized how out of touch he had been all these years.

‘You are also a Fluid Grandmaster. Fine... I guess Minerva is screwed, but I’d still do my part to the end. I’ll keep you here as long as I can.’

A golden radiance suddenly shone forth from his body and Crodores' gaseous body began to swell anarchically like a stomach distended by a lavish meal. The wound in Kagorim's heart magically regenerated and his cracked, dull skin regained its previous luster.

With superhuman speed, he thrust his greatsword into Ilfora's heart, but instead of stealing her energy, he gave it back to her, restoring her nearly extinguished body to its previous brightness. Then he kicked her out of Crodores' body and began to swing his blade wildly around him.

Crodores let out a pained shriek and immediately freed his victim. Injured and scared, the gaseous Inquisitor retreated to his comrade's side, conveniently away from Ethlando.

'Intercept Ronald and the other traitors if there are any left.' Kagorim calmly ordered Ilfora as he solemnly swung his sword at the four most dangerous enemies he had ever faced.

Surprisingly, no one stopped the female Inquisitor from bolting away.

This time, he might not escape alive. And yet, it was this uncertainty that rekindled the flame of excitement in his heart that his conversion to Inquisitor had previously extinguished.

'Today, I will demonstrate to you why everyone calls me the Undying.'