

From Flame to Steam Legion

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Vitruvius Stormbrewer cautiously peeked over the rock outcropping he was hiding behind, trying his best to ensure the clunky tank attached to his back didn't make his presence known. The charr engineer was on a dangerous and incredibly strange mission in search of the perfect test subject: a Flame Legion shaman. Shamans were fond of infusing their bodies with fire itself, and Vitruvius was curious if such magic could be put to a more...productive use for his own Iron Legion. Many of the machines in his workshop ran off steam power, which at times was difficult to maintain. However, a late-night spark of inspiration had given the engineer the odd idea of creating a living steam engine. A shaman could theoretically produce a nearly endless source of fire, so could forcing them to drink a considerable amount of water create steam?

His elementalist friend Raf had vehemently refused to test the theory on himself, leaving the impatient Vitruvius no other choice but to trek into the wilderness to find an even less willing assistant. Equipped with a heavy duty fire extinguisher as his water source and a hovering sneak gyro for a convenient cloak, the engineer had spent days hoping to find a suitable shaman. Fortunately the search was over. Below was a lone, bored-looking charr, dressed sparingly in wrappings and holding a staff of scorched steel. More importantly, though, were the searing, molten orbs of his eyes and faint orange glow of his arms. There was no doubt in Vitruvius' mind he'd found a shaman.

After waiting a while to ensure his target was truly alone, Vitruvius quietly activated his sneak gyro and began creeping closer to the shaman, who was woefully unaware of his surroundings. His heart was thumping with every step, fearful he'd stumble and give his position away, or discover the shaman was faking obliviousness and luring him into a trap. Concern only grew the closer he got. Timing would be vital, as Vitruvius had to overwhelm the other charr before he could either call for help or fight back with magic. When the shaman let out a yawn Vitruvius made his move.

With expert precision Vitruvius shoved the end of his fire extinguisher's cannon right into the open mouth of the shaman. A flick of a switch caused plates to clamp over the charr's muzzle to lock the cannon in place, and Vitruvius swiftly pulled the trigger afterward as his cloak dissipated. The surprised shaman's cheeks swelled as water suddenly began gushing into his mouth and down his throat, his bright eyes growing wide. He staggered backwards, the water cannon still tightly locked in, dropping his staff in the confusion as his dark brown middle expanded outwards as it filled with water. Then the hissing started.

Both charr looked down—Vitruvius in excitement and the shaman in terror—their gazes met with a belly ballooning far more rapidly than before. Vitruvius' theory had been right. The molten magic within the shaman was flash evaporating the torrent of water, turning into a cloud of steam that had no way of escaping. Now the engineer just needed to see if his rough guesses as to how much steam a charr body could safely contain were right; if the calculations were off he'd be left with rather useless scraps after all.

Small whiffs of steam leaked from the shaman's mouth and nostrils as he continued to round out, his arms and legs even puffing up a bit in the process. The ceremonial wrappings he'd so caringly worn gradually stretched and tore, falling to the ground in tatters as he grew. Still dazed by the whole ordeal, the shaman's arms cooled down as he lost focus, though there was nothing he could do to quench the flames in his belly. He had no way of knowing Vitruvius' intentions, and flailed about in horror, assuming his enemy was intent on bursting him apart. The truth of the situation wasn't much better.

As the shaman's body became spherical and began to engulf his swollen limbs, Vitruvius yanked his water cannon forwards enough to cause his target to roll onto his bloated middle, guaranteeing immobility. He finally let go of the trigger, and waited with baited breath as the remaining water within the shaman transformed into steam, hoping his math was right. The shaman's head had

sunk into the dome of his neck, his paws twitching wildly as they poked out of his immense form. There were definite creaks echoing from the charr's body amidst the loud hissing, and he could feel his hide being stretched to its limits as the pressure built. He'd always known he might go out in battle, but never in such a humiliating way; at least there weren't any other Flame Legion members nearby to spread word of his shameful end.

Eventually the hissing reduced to a whisper, though, replaced by faint creaks and the shaman's pitiful whimpers. Vitruvius gave the blimped up charr's side a curious poke, finding it to be incredibly taut, but intact. He'd succeeded. Another switch detached the end of the water cannon from the shaman, leaving a solid metal muzzle behind to prevent any unwanted steam from leaking out. The engineer grinned widely in triumph, gently prodding his test subject and checking for potential leaks or weak spots. Fortunately the shaman appeared safely intact.

"Perfect, absolutely perfect!" Vitruvius said. "Your internal fire magic really is an efficient source of steam."

The shaman's eyes nervously followed his captor, the muzzle effectively muffling his attempts to reply.

"Of course I'll still need to get you installed in my workshop to see how well you replace the generator," Vitruvius mused. "You'll take up a bit more space than the current one, but I think you'll be cheaper to maintain, and far more mobile as well! Heck, if this works out, I might even be able to convince the Emperor to convert our whole power grid to steam shamans!"

Now fully aware of his enemy's goals, the shaman wobbled about in fright. As far as he was concerned, being permanently trapped as a steam-filled blimp was a fate worse than death.

"Oh stop complaining. Serving time as a generator will be good for ya, maybe you'll even be allowed to rejoin the other Legions for good behavior. After a few years." Vitruvius smiled.

The engineer's words did little to quell the fears of the shaman, who whimpered in despair.

"Alright, I probably shouldn't be lingering around here for long." Vitruvius strapped the water cannon to the pack on his back. "The nearest outpost is about a day's journey from here, so hopefully you're durable enough to handle the bumpy roll there."

Amidst muffled complaints and whines Vitruvius began rolling his brand new steam generator home, eager to begin the next phase of the experiment.