

The Oracle Paths

Volume 4: The Purgatory

Chapter 452 – Showdown with Inquisitors (part 3)

‘Aaaarrgh!’

The gut-wrenching shriek of pain and the ensuing blast of heat startled Oxium and his opponents alike. Subconsciously, they turned their heads and saw a pile of liquid mercury being squashed mercilessly in the hands of a human torch.

Mercury was a heavy white metal with the rare property of being liquid at room temperature. It solidified at -38.842°C , and evaporated at 356.62°C . In its pure form, it was a neurotoxic and reprotoxic agent capable of causing all sorts of harmful effects on health depending on the quantity accumulated by the body. In case of acute intoxication, one could experience the same panoply of symptoms that Drastan had suffered from earlier.

Such a body had severe limitations. Nonetheless, for a warrior specializing in brute force like the Troll Slayer, it was the worst possible match up. Having the strength to pulverize a mountain would make no difference here.

On the other hand, if it was someone like Jake or Enya who was handling it this Inquisitor didn't stand a chance. For mercury had two major drawbacks:

First, its density. At 13.6 grams per cubic centimeter, Croyorn's mercury body weighed over 1.5 tons. For Jake, this was nothing, but for the Fluid Master who had just begun his physical evolution, it was

a real burden. To move, he constantly expended a lot of energy, resorting to a form of telekinesis.

As a result, Croyorn was a rather slow Fluid Wielder, his precognition and superhuman reflexes being completely wasted on him.

The second major weakness was his critical vulnerability to high temperatures.

Unable to dodge Jake's charge because of his heaviness, as soon as his body came into contact with flames exceeding 2000°C it evaporated virtually on the spot.

To ruin his chances of escape, Jake trapped him with his telekinesis and set about incinerating him alive. The lump of mercury was compressed to the size of a basketball and quickly reached an unbelievable temperature.

The metal ball turned white-hot as it met the requirements of a plasma, and Croyorn's tortured screams were quickly replaced by silence. Just when Jake thought he was done with him, his senses registered a change in the surrounding Fluid.

A tremendous dark energy suddenly converged on the glowing metal ball and was quickly sucked into it as if it were a black hole with an endless appetite. Jake then felt a counter pressure resist his telekinesis and the mercury ball suddenly regained some volume.

'Let go and die!' Jake snapped.

'ROOOOARRRR!'

A terrifying roar suddenly erupted from the compressed mass of mercury. In horror, Jake saw a familiar monstrous face appear on the surface of the plasma, followed by a glowing claw that tried to reach his face.

He instantly knew what was going on: Monster Transformation. These aliens seemed to revel in heat and radiation, both of which hastened their evolution. Faced with his approaching death, the Inquisitor had given up his humanity. Though, he was hardly human to begin with...

Yet, the most likely hypothesis was that Croyorn was already dead or passed out. As soon as his consciousness had waned, the Monster within him had taken over.

The entire action took a while to describe, but only took a couple of seconds in total. When the Monster manifested, Oxium and the others had just recovered from their stupor.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jake saw Oxium dash to his comrade's rescue with a raging gust of wind in his wake, and he knew he had to end it quickly.

'Take cover!' He yelled telepathically as he aimed the compressed mercury ball at Oxium's air body.

Nmru md ovuq ovmpevo ojahu fgmpo ao. Waii vft fizuftw zplvut mpo md ovu vfii jaov val gmtwepfztl, jvaiu Dzflofr frt Varhuro gzmdu mdd f nmzoamr md ovu jfii om nzmouho ovuqluisul guvart f vpeu gmpituz frt f jfouz gfzzauz.

If Oxium attacked seriously, it could be inconceivably fast. The hurricane condensed into a streamlined air bullet, spinning around and so condensed you could barely see it. As if fired by a sniper, Oxium shot straight for Jake's heart at several times the speed of sound.

It was a dangerous move for the Inquisitor, spurred on by his panic. Like Croyorn, he no longer had a physical body, so he depended on his Fluid Control to achieve all of this. By condensing the air in this

way to boost his speed, he was exposing his Fluid Core to enemy retaliation.

Predictably, Jake easily anticipated the air bullet's trajectory and swatted Oxium away with a backhand as it came into range. The deflect was perfect and the Inquisitor ricocheted down the hall behind him. After that, Jake unleashed hell.

The fiery mercury ball hit the same wall as Oxium at roughly the same time and without telekinesis to hold it together, the mercury plasma ball exploded with a thunderous shockwave. Jake held his breath so as not to absorb any vapor and restrained the expansion of the detonation with his powers.

The mercury fiend trying to come to life was blown away as mercury vapor with no chance of reconstituting itself, and Jake enclosed each portion of mercury in a rectangular force field to nip the possibility in the bud.

Soon the vapor cooled and became liquid again, then completely inert. Jake then formed a vent to clear the mercury-saturated air from the hall and removed the telekinetic barriers when he felt it was safe enough.

Jake did not move immediately. With Myrtharian Sight and his Spirit Body deployed, he vigilantly scanned the half-destroyed hall for traces of Oxium. The air-formed Inquisitor had taken some damage, but he didn't think it was enough to deal with it.

'Where is he?'

'Right here.' A deep voice said placatingly right above him.

Looking up, Jake spotted a tiny crack in the ceiling, which he probably wouldn't have noticed straight away without the voice's

intervention. The crack was incredibly thin, just wide enough to allow a draft to pass through.

Intuitively, he thought it was Oxium taunting him, but as he compared this calm, soothing voice to Oxium's meek, airy one, he immediately made note of several differences.

'Who are you?' Jake shouted to the individual on the other side of the crack.

In response, a trail of dark shadow and smoke seeped through the crack and glided down the walls in a split second to reform a human figure before him.

Light leather armor, protective gloves, hood and mask to hide the lower face. Two short swords, a bow, a portable mini crossbow tucked under his wrist, and a host of other accessories and weapons, each more deadly than the last.

Jake didn't even try to argue and lunged forward, grabbing the stranger's throat with his right hand and ramming him into the closest wall.

'Hephaïstos, give me one good reason why I should let you live?' Jake growled as he pressed the tip of a claw against his heart. His lips were curled up, revealing his long translucent fangs.

Hephaïstos was one of Avros' allies in the previous round. An Egean Assassin specializing in Shadow Magic, he was one of his sworn enemies in this Ordeal. With the Australian now serving Isbeus and his Inquisitors, this Player's presence did not bode well.

Far from panicking, the accused assassin raised his hands in the air before pointing to the contents of his left hand with his eyes. With his

Fluid and Aether Vision, Jake immediately identified what was in it: a Fluid Core.

About the size of an apple, its opaque surface gave off a tiny white light. If one listened carefully, one could hear the breeze of the wind just as one could hear the sea by sticking one's ear against a shell.

'Oxium?' Jake whispered with surprise.

'Himself. My gift to prove my good intentions.' Hephais smiled. Taking a closer look at his eyes, he looked quite handsome and young.

Jake probed his expression for a long moment before deciding to release him for the time being.

'Give me the Fluid Core.' He ordered.

The Egean assassin obeyed readily. He had never intended to keep the loot, even though he was the one who had ended the Inquisitor's life.

Meanwhile, the gunfire and explosions outside had also stopped. Drastan, Vincent and Will returned a few minutes later with relieved expressions.

Drastan had regained his normal height and looked as dashing as before the battle. He hadn't been able to do much against those inorganic entities, but he hadn't really suffered either. Most of the damage in the hall had been done by him alone.

Vincent, comparatively speaking, was rather disappointed. He had let himself be trapped by Oxium and had just realized that being too light had not only advantages. He had also found that the Inquisitor had never once taken them seriously. When he was trapped in the tornado, the Inquisitor could have executed him in no time if he had

wanted. It was his greatest humiliation since he first entered these Ordeals.

Will was his usual self and had already put on gloves to inspect the battlefield for treasure. Upon discovering a pinecone-sized Fluid Core covered in liquid mercury at the end of the hall, he almost fainted with excitement. His two Fluid Knights helped him pick it up.

Tim came in a few moments later, his legendary luck having allowed him to escape the entire battle. He said he was napping somewhere in one of the ruined houses at the time of the enemy assault, but his blood-covered axe proved that he too had been involved in the struggle.

Al nzmmd, Pfsfm frt val ozmmnl fzzasut lmmr fdouz frt efsu vaq f qufraredpi immc. Tvu lypft md lmitauzl jfl tmjr om lak dzmq ovu mzaearfi raru. Tvu ojm rfoasul fhmqnfrware ovuq juzu fgluro fl juui fl ovu qfr jaov ovu gfxmmcf.

After taking roll call and making sure no one was missing, Jake turned to Hephais and uttered,

‘Now, speak.’
