

Chapter 409

Domain

Jason was in a small room that was transforming from a dilapidated plaster box with peeling wallpaper to a stone room shaped by his own power. He had tried to open his spirit vault but instead, the space around him seemed to be turning into his spirit vault. It was more than a little disconcerting, although the benefits were obvious. One was that he may have stumbled onto the means by which he could stabilise the transformation zone before it gouged a wound in the skin of the universe.

The other benefit was that Jason could once again express control over his aura. It lacked the specific powers that came from his aura essence ability but he was able to project the power of his soul outwards once more. It only extended as far as the transforming walls, which suggested that Jason could somehow claim dominion over the space by transforming it.

The only part of the room not transforming was the wooden door. Jason was contemplating opening it when it exploded inward as some manner of monstrosity burst in, slamming Jason against the opposite wall. It happened too fast for him to get a sense of what he was fighting, other than it being big, fleshy and warm as it pressed him between its mass and the wall.

He couldn't reach the sword at his hip so he employed wrestling techniques to wedge his arms between himself and his attacker, earning himself some literal wiggle room. This allowed him to slip out of the creature's press and take what little space he could in the enclosed room.

The creature was comical in proportion: a blob of muscly flesh on a pair of ordinary human legs that looked far too frail to support it. It had no arms, no face, just a pink, fleshy mass. Jason wasn't even sure how it squeezed through the normal-sized door. As it awkwardly turned its legs in his direction, he drew his sword, which seemed to enrage the creature. The front of it opened like a mouth, the skin and flesh pulling apart with a wet ripping sound. Square, uneven, fist-sized teeth pushed their way through the meat at the top and bottom of the wound-mouth. It let out a scream of rage and pain that chilled Jason's blood.

Jason backed up hard against the wall as it rushed him again, lifting both feet to intercept the creature, pushing back against it to maintain a gap as it pushed him harder into the wall. It snapped its mouth as Jason fended it off with his legs, his sword held

overhead in both hands. He started stabbing down but the blade slid off its rubbery skin, leaving not so much as a scratch.

The creature managed to get its mouth around one of Jason's boots, twisting to fling him around. He barely held on to his sword with one hand as the creature shook him like a dog with a toy. Using his silver-rank flexibility and strength, Jason flexed at the waist to extend his empty hand into the creature's mouth, grabbing one of the big square teeth. He used the leverage thus gained to plunge the sword into the creature's mouth, burying it deep into the flesh within. Yanking the blade savagely back and forth, he ignored the crushing force of the mouth on his arm and foot until the creature dropped dead. It's lifeless body landing heavily atop Jason.

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- You have defeated [Living Anomaly].
 - Would you like to loot [Living Anomaly]?

 - Interaction with [Living Anomaly] has instigated random changes in weapon [Dread Salvation]. Further interaction will consolidate change.
 - Ability [Nirvanic Transfiguration] has stabilised and refined changes to weapon [Dread Salvation].
 - [Dread Salvation] transformation status: 0.4%.

 - You have established a spirit domain. Expanding your spirit domain will define and stabilise unstable genesis space but trigger anomalous reactions from genesis space outside the spirit domain.

 - Interaction with genesis space has instigated uncontrolled secondary evolution of ability [Spirit Vault]. Further interaction will complete evolution.
 - Ability [Nirvanic Transfiguration] has stabilised and refined the secondary evolution path of [Spirit Vault].
 - [Spirit Vault] evolution status: 0.003%.

The first thing Jason did was loot the monster sprawled on top of him, which dissolved into the thickest rainbow smoke Jason had ever encountered. Unlike normal rainbow smoke, which was incorporeal and passed through any solid object before dissolving into the astral, this smoke was heavy, oily and seeped into the smoky glass bricks of the room. It also had, by some dark miracle, an even more repellent stench than regular rainbow smoke, which already smelled like hair being burned inside the carcass of a dead whale. Even with Jason not needing to breath, it was like the rancid stink was permeating his skin.

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- [Spirit Vault] evolution status: 0.004%.

 - [Stable Genesis Core] has been added to your inventory.

- 10 [Silver Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - 100 [Bronze Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - 1000 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
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Jason lay on the floor, feeling his injuries rapidly heal. The fact that Colin's regeneration was still in effect probably meant that the vessels of his familiar were intact and simply unavailable, which was good. He was unable to pull out Gordon's orbs, which meant that only the passive bonuses of his familiars were being passed along while the active ones remained sealed away with his essence abilities.

After pushing himself up to a sitting position and shuffling back to lean against the wall, Jason took a closer look at the system messages. Using his sword on the creature had triggered a nascent transformation in the weapon, with his Nirvanic Transfiguration ability directing that change in a positive direction. The same was true for using his spirit vault power to stabilise the transformation space.

He reminded himself to have Dawn thank the World-Phoenix for the power. He knew that it wasn't generosity but the need for a tool that could repair the damage to Earth. Since he would have tried to do it either way, though, he was grateful for the ability. More and more he realised that it shaped him into exactly the right tool for the job. Without it, he would have failed long ago.

"Greg called me a tool more than once," he said to the empty room with a sad smile. "I guess I can't begrudge some super god from taking it literally."

Jason's independent streak was strong but, for the moment at least, he and the World-Phoenix had the same objectives. He might not trust the great astral beings, with their alien minds and epoch-spanning agendas but he was forced to acknowledge that they had done a lot for him. Whatever their motivations, the World-Phoenix brought him both home and back from the dead, while the Reaper brought back Farrah. If the price for all that was saving a world or two, he was happy to pay it.

Jason looked up to where the rainbow smoke from the living anomaly seemed to be absorbed by the space he had stabilised. There were a lot of unanswered questions about the living anomaly. Firstly, how did Jason's power know it was called a living anomaly? Did his mind arbitrarily assign it or did Jason have some kind of extremely powerful divination power he was unable to actively employ? There was also the question of the anomaly's rank.

Jason's aura senses had been restored alongside his aura, albeit in a similarly restricted fashion. It was definitely enough to recognise that the anomaly had been silver rank, though. Was that a coincidence? It seemed odd that a reality-reshaping event would

be limited to silver-rank power. Was it a factor of earth's low magical density or was it related to Jason himself? He searched through the system messages again.

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- You have established a spirit domain. Expanding your spirit domain will define and stabilise unstable genesis space but trigger anomalous reactions from genesis space outside the spirit domain.
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Did the anomaly appear as a reaction to Jason using his spirit vault power? It made sense to Jason that if the anomaly was triggered by his action, the resulting reaction would share his power level. It seemed likely that more of those things would appear as he attempted to stabilise the space, so hopefully, they wouldn't be much more powerful.

It had been very weak compared to most silver-rank monsters, falling into the variety that normally appeared in large packs and was severely lacking in fortitude. Even so, the bronze-rank sword had trouble piercing the creature's skin, forcing Jason to attack its more vulnerable insides. The anomalies that appeared in the future were likely to be far more numerous as he expanded the stable area and more of them spawned.

Jason looked to the door that had been shattered to splinters by the monster's entry. It was dark outside and without his perception power, the gloom obstructed his vision. The last thing he did before going out was taking the item he looted from the monster from his inventory to examine.

Item: [Stable Genesis Core] (unranked, common)

A refined vessel of transformative potential energy (consumable, magic core).

- Effect: Use to set up spiritual domains. Expanding spiritual domains requires additional cores based on the size of the spiritual domain.
 - You are in the vicinity of your spirit domain. Cost to expand: 1 [Stable Genesis Core]. Would you like to expand your spirit domain?
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Jason declined for the moment but was satisfied to have what looked like a viable method to achieve his goal. He had come in with no solid idea of what to do but now there was a path ahead of him. As best he could determine, he would need to expand his spiritual domain using his spirit vault power, and then harvest the anomalies that attacked so he could expand it more.

Either he would need to completely convert the transformation space or maybe just reach some kind of threshold that stabilised it enough that a wound wasn't torn in the side

of reality. He just hoped that he could handle however many anomalies came at him while he didn't have his combat powers.

Putting away the core, he got to his feet and resheathed his sword, the blood and gore on it having dissolved into smoke. He made his way to the door to find what awaited him. He emerged into what looked like a hotel hallway, in the same state of disrepair as the room he just left had been. The transformation brought about by his spirit vault had stopped inside the room.

There was more peeling wallpaper and thin carpet with patches where the underlay or the floorboards underneath could be seen. There were fluorescent ceiling lights in the hall, most of which were dark. Only a few sporadically flickered, shedding intermittent light. If he had his shadow powers it would have been a welcome environment. Instead, he felt what he suspected others did when they knew he was out there, somewhere in the dark.

Rather than immediately try and expand his spirit domain, he decided to explore a little. After leaving the room he was no longer able to project his aura, so he was left relying on his mundane senses. He had two directions to go, right or left, and chose left at random. He tried some of the doors he passed but they were all locked. He didn't try breaking in.

As Jason moved further down the hall, he slowed and then stopped as a wrongness nagged at his senses. It was frustrating to be impaired by the dark for the first time in years and he was unsure what exactly had tripped his instincts. Looking around in the flickering light, he fixed on the walls, something about them not seeming quite right. He drew his sword and ran the tip gently along the wall, which scraped away the surface as if the walls were a façade; a wet, thickly layered painting of a wall rather than the wall itself.

He tried pushing his sword in deeper and it dug in with little resistance, but the reaction was immediate. The wall around his sword flinched like a living thing, drawing back and threatening to pull the sword from his hands. Pulling the sword free of the wall, he examined the blade to find it coated in a clay-like substance, mixed with what looked and smelled like blood. The wall returned to its original position, once more looking like a wall except for a hole leaking more blood.

Jason took some cautious steps forward and the patchy carpet started squelching underfoot, having become the same paint-like substance as the wall. He backed off, back onto actual carpet. Checking that he'd been passing through an actual hallway, he identified the point that ostensibly normal hallway gave way to a strange paint-flesh thing. Heading down the other way, he confirmed that in either direction, the hallway started

turning strange at points equidistant from his spirit domain, the room in which he had arrived.

Nothing else had attacked Jason during his exploration of the hallway, leading him to postulate that nothing would until he either expanded the spirit domain or delved further into the strange space beyond it. He stood outside the room he had arrived in, which was currently the extent of his spirit domain. Once more he took the stable genesis core from his inventory.

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“Sure,” he said. Immediately the doorway started transforming from dilapidated wood into dark, smoky crystal. The effect spread along the walls, floor and ceiling, extending down the hall. The dead or flickering ceiling lights were replaced with glowing crystals that spread cool light down the hall. From the dim reaches beyond, Jason heard the sounds of movement.