

## Chapter 416

### Guns & Money

Jason, Chen, Guo and Gerling walked in the direction of the pagoda, through streets painted with dead anomalies.

“Just to be clear, you are renouncing any claim you might have to these bodies, outside of taking a few cores,” Jason said. His tone made it clear that it wasn’t a question.

A quirk of Jason’s looting ability was that he could only loot his own or unattended kills. It was likely that once the gold-rankers left, all the anomalies would count as unattended but he wanted to make sure they relinquished the rights to them. He didn’t want to risk being unable to loot enough cores to keep expanding his spirit domain.

“Of course,” Chen said. Jason knew that Chen had gleaned some insight into the nature of Jason’s ability from the exchange but that wasn’t enough to risk losing all the cores.

Around the pagoda was the area where the dead anomalies were at their thickest, having gathered around it while waiting for Jason and the others to emerge. They had done so in a storm of violence, leaving a sea of the dead. Picking their way through the bodies, Guo gathered up a half-dozen of the unstable black and red cores in his arms. Chen only took a pair of them, one in each hand. He looked at Guo carrying so many and was met by a challenging glare.

“What?” Guo asked.

“Nothing,” said Chen, who then glanced at the empty-handed Gerling.

“Aren’t you going to join us, Mr Gerling?”

Gerling looked at Jason, then at the core in Chen’s hands.

“I’m good,” Gerling said.

“I really think you should,” Chen insisted, “if only for the sake of caution.”

Chen’s eyes flicked in Guo’s direction and he shared a look with Gerling.

“Right,” Gerling said. “Need to avoid any mishaps.”

Jason observed the exchange and watched Gerling pick up a pair of cores.

“What are you talking about?” Guo asked.

“Let’s just get out of here,” Gerling said. “I’m running low on mana and I don’t want this shield to crap out.”

Jason led them to the elevator, escorting them up to the portal room. Guo gave Jason a hostile glare.

“We’re going to meet again,” Guo said. “Things will be very different outside your private magic land.”

Not waiting for a response, Guo carried his armload of unstable genesis cores through the portal. The other three watched the portal for reactions but there were no visible changes.

“Should we just leave these cores here?” Chen asked Jason. Having prevented Guo from suspecting the cores might be dangerous to carry through; neither he nor Gerling was going to take the same risk.

“I’ll take them,” Jason said, collecting the cores from Chen and Gerling.

“How long should we wait?” Gerling asked. “If those cores just explode immediately we should be fine, but if they do something weird on the other side, we might want to give it a minute.”

“You don’t have a minute,” Jason said. “Get out or I shut the portal, wait for you to die and then loot your corpses before getting on with what I came here to do.”

“Close that portal on us and we’ll make sure you die before we do,” Gerling said.

Jason flashed him a snake’s grin.

“Are you sure about that?” Jason asked. “Think about what happens when we meet. You try to catch me and I escape immediately. You lose to a vampire and I kill it easily. Are willing to bet your life on my bag of tricks being empty?”

Gerling’s huge frame towered over Jason, who looked up unflinchingly at the face of his brother’s killer. Chen reached up to put a hand on Gerling’s shoulder.

“That should be delay enough,” Chen said. “Mr Asano, I hope the next time we meet it will be as allies. I believe you’re an enemy I would rather not have.”

“Then you should be more discerning in the company you keep. That said, I imagine we will all stand together when the time comes. The vampires are too used to dominance to not try and take over and I suspect their numbers are greater than any of us realised.”

Chen nodded and then stepped through the portal without another word. Gerling gave Jason an angry but conflicted look before following.

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Jason went about the laborious task of touching each of the dead anomalies to loot them. Eventually, the streets were cleared, the anomalies all gone up in rainbow smoke. All that remained were some unstable genesis cores violently expelled from the anomalies and not converted to stable ones when he looted the bodies.

The haul was a huge boost to Jason’s coffers, with ten silver spirit coins and an equivalent value of bronze and iron coming from each one. It reached the point that Jason

was glad spirit coins appeared in his inventory as a simple counter or he'd need a storage pit like Scrooge McDuck.

There were also the expected stable genesis cores, although a good number of unstable ones had already been violently expelled from the anomalies and weren't converted by his loot power.

Aside from the spirit coins and the cores, he looted quite a lot of healing unguent and a handful of other items. There were a few mana potions, as well as a shape-changing potion that would allow for minor physical changes. Jason was familiar with such potions from the other world, although he had never used one. They could be used for disguise or to make more combative modifications, such as claws or bone spikes sticking out from the body. It generally wasn't considered a strong combat tool, but with his powers sealed, Jason would take anything he could get.

Jason's belt was enchanted to protect the potion vials in it from incidental damage. Jason hadn't used it since reaching silver rank because it was only iron-rank and the protections were ineffective against any threat that would push him hard enough to need a potion.

With Jason's abilities replenishing him more effectively than potions, it was only useful as a sword belt and he hadn't been using his sword, either. In his current circumstances, though, Jason was almost entirely reliant on items to boost his combat ability, even if the items were less than ideal.

The other objects he looted seemed to fit the retro-futuristic feel of the city before Jason started transforming it. One was a self-boiling kettle that looked halfway between a coffee machine from the fifties and a cartoon bomb.

"Does this really need to be silver rank?" he wondered, holding it in his hands. He shrugged, remembering that the other world had higher-rank cooking ingredients in high magic areas.

What most caught his eye was the selection of weapons that he looted, nine of them in total. The most attention-grabbing was a very large gun and some kind of bazooka. To Jason, the firearm looked like a steampunk minigun, while the rocket launcher would be at home in a Jetsons spin-off movie where Elroy got drafted and went to war.

Both weapons had a hopper on the top that looked suspiciously well-shaped to accommodate a genesis core. The minigun-looking weapon came complete with a shoulder strap so it could be carried slung and fired from the hip.

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Item: [Instability Regulator] (silver rank, epic)

*A device that regulates and discharges the energy from unstable genesis cores in a relatively safe manner. For safety reasons, do not discharge device in the direction of nearby people or objects (weapon, gun).*

- Effect: Consumes an [Unstable Genesis Core] to fuel powerful energy discharges. Fully depleted cores are transmuted into [Genesis Reclamation Cores].
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The description didn't cover what a genesis reclamation core was, but he hoped it would help him accelerate claiming territory for his spirit domain. He had no idea how long the unstable transformation zone would hold together before it collapsed and tore a hole in the side of the universe.

Jason turned his attention to the bazooka.

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Item: [Instability Agitator] (silver rank, uncommon)

*A weapon that further destabilises unstable genesis cores, shrouds them in a short-lived containment field and then launches them (weapon, grenade launcher).*

- Effect: Converts an [Unstable Genesis Core] into an explosive projectile.
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To Jason's mind, it was inferior to the minigun weapon, although if he needed to blow up something really big, it might be useful. He thought of the vast and distant silhouettes he had seen from the roof of his pagoda and realised that he would probably need a bigger bazooka.

The remaining weapons consisted of three identical ray gun pistols that looked right out of Buck Rogers, two in belt holsters and the other in a shoulder holster. There were two rifles, one in an old-school ray gun design like the pistols and one that had no barrel at all. He picked that one up to examine. It was largely silvery-metallic with rounded components, an aesthetic that continued to the orb on the end of a rod it had instead of a barrel.

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Item: [Arc Rifle] (silver rank, rare)

*Lightning rifle (weapon, grenade launcher).*

- Effect: Consume mana to attack using electricity. Has a chance to chain attacks to secondary targets.
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- Effect: Has a chance to inflict [Muscle Paralysis] on targets with musculature or equivalent organic functionality.
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- Effect: Has a chance to deliver an electromagnetic surge to electronic devices.

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“Lightning gun,” Jason said reverently. He immediately tested it out, firing a wild blast of blue-white lightning down the street. The arc bent in the air to strike a car by the side of the road.

“Homing lightning,” Jason said with a huge grin. The weapon consumed a large amount of mana even from a short burst, however. “Let’s call it an awesomeness tax.”

The arc rifle had a bandolier it came with that didn’t seem to attach to the gun in any way. Instead, it had some metal disks, the purpose of which Jason was unsure of until he spent some time examining them and realised they were magnetic.

Jason put on the bandolier and slung the arc rifle onto his back where it neatly clamped into place. He pulled out the rifle and stowed it on his back multiple times, finding that quickly grabbing it or putting it away was easy and reliable. It always seemed to find the magnetic grips and was held in place with just the right amount of force.

Given the smoothness of the action, he suspected the grips had some magic assistance for ease of use. Jason appreciated that more than a magic gun with extra features that might never get used. During his time on Earth, he had looted a lot of guns which he had handed over to the Network, many of which had pointless peripheral effects.

The last two weapons were for melee combat. One was a heavy iron gauntlet that went up to the elbow. It had similar effects to the lightning gun but with less mana consumption and the ability to serve as armour. It was far too bulky for Jason though, so it was quickly dropped into his inventory. The last weapon was an electrified rod, only a little shorter than his sword. He already had his sword, so it likewise went into the inventory.

After some debate, Jason risked trying to store unstable orbs in his inventory and found they were perfectly fine, even stacking safely in a single inventory slot and not occupying a lot of space. Then the heavy weapons went in.

The pistols he equipped directly. The two in belt holsters went on his right hip and back, with his sword remaining on his left hip. He then slung on the shoulder holster for the third.

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Item: [Pulse Blaster] (silver rank, common)

*Energy pistol* (weapon, pistol).

- Effect: Fires a blast of energy at the cost of mana. Basic blasts are an efficient balance of power to mana cost.
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  - Effect: Change up mana to fire a powerful but mana-inefficient blast.
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Jason had tried magic guns in the past. He had never used them in combat because his powers were always the superior choice, but he was capable enough. Even at bronze-rank, the proprioception and reflexes of his speed attribute combined with the spatial awareness and sharp senses of his spirit attribute had been formidable. Although he would be no match for a practised expert, now that his attributes were silver-rank, he was confident he would adapt quickly.

With a small arsenal of guns at his disposal, Jason was much more confident about facing down another horde of anomalies. Ranged attack options and the ability to pull out the heavy weapons meant that, so long as he was careful, even a huge wave should be manageable. That was assuming, he reminded himself, that the next wave of anomalies was as weak as the last one.

The last items Jason had to look at were the two that came from looting the gold-ranker-turned-vampire, Tran. Looting powers on low-rankers only rifled through their possessions and dimensional storage space, if they had one. High-rakers, including Jason himself, were different. From a purely physical perspective, there was little difference between the body of a gold-ranker and a monster and looting powers affected them the same way.

Many silver-rankers and even some bronze rankers also had monster-like bodies made of what amounted to congealed magic. Jason himself had been like that from his very arrival in the other world, although his low-rank body had been made up of very impure magic. He still remembered passing out as his body instigated a massive purge on reaching iron-rank.

Along with the usual pile of coins, Jason had looted two items from Tran. The first was a black and red bracelet, which he looted directly, while the second was produced by Jason's outworlder ability, defiant, which gave him extra loot from powerful enemies. That item was a lamp made from silver and gold, with sapphire settings.

Neither item was useful to Jason in the immediacy but he anticipated both being valuable once he left the transformation zone behind. He put them in his inventory and turned his attention to once more expanding his domain.