

Chapter 43D: Year 2, Day 53 - Blue

Depletion resolved.

[Purifier] title fulfilled. Permanent reduction to level requirements.

Dungeon has reached level 20! 10 trait points earned.

I was not all that surprised that Shayma got me five levels at once. It *was* nice to see that there was some consideration in the way dungeons were designed for running out of a leveling condition. Not that I really felt I needed the benefits of additional levels at the moment, not after being so flush with trait points and extra cores, but over time it probably would have been irritating to be so limited.

Part of me was nonetheless disappointed that a full five levels didn't come with another growth marker and another set of special benefits. I was pretty sure that fixing, apparently, a *core part of magic* would result in something pretty amazing, but that would have to wait. I was pretty sure I'd get there eventually.

The Great Dungeon really *was* part of the world's basic infrastructure, or at least, a core part of the governing setup. The only access I had to it was the moment that Shayma linked us together, which was a bizarre overload of sensory data and an almost fugue-like blank on my side. I was absolutely certain it was meant to govern air Affinity though, which made me wonder how the Affinity had survived over the thousands of years without a primary governor. Probably one of the other dungeons had taken it up, but once the Great Dungeon had woken up it had taken back control.

Shayma had more insight than me, and had found out that the Great Dungeon had been cut from the Akasha, and, in blind mechanical logic, had simply tried making its own. Though if it weren't for the mage-kings taking a red core and assuming control of it, bringing it out into the world and forcing the dungeon awake, it never would have mattered. It would have been its own cut-off little world forever, and while it would never have generated new races, it wasn't like there was a lack of peoples above and below the earth to begin with.

It might have been hard to believe except for the fact that Shayma had a double Status to my overlay, and one that didn't show up even to Ansa's divination runes. Considering that it was Ansa's, I took that to mean that it was working off of something different than the normal Status setup. Besides, it didn't look like a normal status.

Shayma Ell

Health: [FULL]

Resources: [FULL]

[GUIDE]

Guided Dungeon: [AIR]

Link: [ACTIVE]

Skill: [Dungeon Rapport]

Attribute: [Dungeon Sense]

In a way it looked more like *my* Status, what with non-explanations for things, but it didn't use any of the nomenclature a normal Status did. If I had to guess, this was something closer to what a Controller Status was like, as Controllers were somewhere between a normal Class and whatever the isolated Akasha had managed to come up with.

Companion Shayma Ell Level 95 available.

Not surprisingly, Shayma had gotten a goodly amount of experience out of it as well, I assumed from the [Hero] part of her Class. Not enough to tier up, despite the magnitude of her accomplishment, but that probably wasn't necessary either. From what I understood, Shayma probably didn't need *any* particular level to do what she'd done, though I was sure that it helped.

The Great Dungeon wasn't hostile, but it was still ridiculously huge, so I left a seed-ship in the core room in case Shayma ever needed access to its core again. Neither of us were certain how likely that was, but without boring another hole straight through the dungeon and asking Ansaë to accelerate us to hypersonic speeds, delving down to the core from the outside would take some time. Probably years.

At least the way Shayma had resolved things meant I didn't need to keep the containment ringwall up, which was just as well since it had blown out in at least three places during the fight and would have been useless anyway. Still, it took time to pull out of it, sending all the cores back to the Caldera, and I needed an anchor to portal Shayma and Ansaë back up. After all, we still had all the mage-king islands to deal with. Those red cores were connected in some hazy way to the Great Dungeon, but weren't controlled by it, so I still had to take care of them.

Just because I, or rather, Shayma had resolved the original source of depletion didn't mean the red cores were fixed. At this point, though, it was more of an afterthought than any kind of serious trouble. The question was how many mage-kings took Ansaë's warning seriously, and how many we'd be summarily executing. I wasn't going to be too fussed either way.

The burst of stellar mana from the Great Dungeon had both transformed and destroyed the net I'd been using to sieve out depletion, sending crystalline flaming stone in all directions. Huge chunks of the stuff had splashed into the water, sinking to the bottom of the sea and no doubt becoming an interesting find for some Leviathan in the far future. The entire rimwall had been converted into a black, luminous material, surrounding a massive plunge into a great blooming forest of stellar-flavored plants.

Despite being absolutely full of stuff with stellar Affinity, there was now plenty of normal, depletion-free wind and storm mana pouring out, which had a predictable effect on the local atmosphere. The huge swirling vortex was back, but it was dissipating outward, sustained only by the outflow of the dungeon below. Which meant it would go away eventually, I hoped, and in the meantime there were a lot of stormclouds being sent out to drift over the ocean.

Frankly it all went against the way that weather was actually supposed to work, but under the circumstances I didn't really expect anything else. Neither Ansaë nor Shayma were much bothered by the weather, both of them being fairly immune to anything short of orbital bombardment – and in Ansaë's case, even that probably wouldn't faze her – but both of them took deep breaths as they appeared on the surface again.

"That is so nice," Shayma said. "I never realized what was missing from air Affinity."

"I never really marked air Affinity as having anything wrong with it either, yet here we are," Ansaë agreed.

"I have no idea what you two are on about," I told them.

"The air just feels better," Shayma told me. "More alive."

"If I had to guess," Ansaë said judiciously, "air Affinity has been somewhat crippled until now. It worked, obviously, but there are some subtleties that were lost. Of course, with primal Affinity it doesn't matter so much, but I might learn new things anyway."

"Then we've fixed it. I know my overlay said so, but I'm glad to hear it from you, too."

"Yes," Shayma agreed. "I know there's cleanup to do, there always is. But for the moment? Let's go home."