

Chapter 43C: Year 2, Day 53 – Ansae

Every true dragon liked fire.

Even those who went with affinities such as glacial or storm had their own versions of the flames, like coldfire and arcfire. Even though fire Affinity itself was not widely considered a particularly strong one, everyone paid their respects to what was probably the original Affinity for the species. The new stellar Affinity added quite the range to a dragon's favorite element, as well as scope.

Even Ansae had never seen something burn on quite the scale as the Great Dungeon purging itself. In every direction, so far as she could sense, there was fire. It wasn't just cleansing fire, it was something that was very rare to find in anyone's interpretation of the Affinity: the fire of rebirth. It was beautiful and terrible, something even she would have to treat with caution, and perhaps the greatest capstone of Blue's stellar abilities. Even [Event Horizon], as great and terrible as it was, only destroyed.

She slitted her eyes as something subtle and alien rippled out from the cores at the center of it all. Neither Shayma nor Blue seemed to notice, and even for her it was difficult to detect, but it was something she recognized. Even from the faintest hint, it was impossible to mistake a brush of one of the gods as anything else. There was no manifestation, no revelation or even something that could be called approval. It was, if anything, only the most distant residue of their presence, but it was confirmation that the Great Dungeons *were* the tools of the gods. Not that she had ever doubted.

Even with her knowledge and senses it was difficult to tell what that particular touch *did*. It may have only been a passing shadow, or it may have been the full attention of one of those legendary and abstruse beings. After all, the absolute block on intent and insane complexity of the dungeon cores was tailor made to protect the world, and those in it, from the overwhelming presence of such things. She would never forget the horrible, world-bending presence of a mere echo of a question of a god.

It had never been clear to her what the question was. If the echo simply spoke words it was done only with the greatest care, the same care she used when invoking her full nature as The Silver Woe, and was just as dangerous and painful a prospect for all involved. In hindsight, she had to wonder. There had been fragments in there about death and depths and air and heir, and now that the Great Dungeon of Air was restored to function, it seemed quite possible that the question had been about the damage done to the dungeon, and what was going on in the world. Of course, it was only long after such an interpretation could have been useful that it came to her, and even then it was only if she squinted really hard.

She took a deep breath of newly-burned and newly-turned air as other changes, some subtle and some overt, washed over her. The Silver Woe was no mere title, her power no mere vanity. It was not ego to say that she safeguarded the world, in a way neither god nor mortal could. Once every few generations there arose the mad, the power-hungry, the terrible beyond sanity, that found some way to threaten the foundations of creation itself.

Sometimes they threatened to shake magic itself, other times they created some spreading blight with no clear limitations. Perhaps they found some terrible knowledge that would destroy every mind that encountered it, throwing everything back to savagery and war without end. Countries and empires rose

and fell, the shape of the land itself changed, and that was fine. But civilization and life itself was surprisingly fragile.

Burning everything to the ground was the best way to deal with such threats. While it was devastating at the time, at least things would regrow. Scars like the waste north of Tarnil showed what happened when other people tried the same. The Silver Woe was that which came upon the tides of woe, to take and to give in equal measure.

Depletion, then, had been her responsibility. It was the imperative of her Title and her Power to deal with something that threatened to poison the whole world, given time. That she hadn't realized its danger before it started spreading rankled her, but seeing the true scope of what she had to contend with, Ansaë knew that she wouldn't have been ready for it all those centuries ago anyway.

In the end, she hadn't destroyed the threat herself, but she had hardly been a bystander, and that was enough. She could feel the urgent drumbeat of her title fade into the background, the trappings of her Power unfurling as the threat faded. A glance at her own Status, the divinatory runes long embedded into her flesh, showed that she had actually gained a level or two from the feat. Without the depletion counter, it was somewhat more difficult to discern, not that the specifics actually mattered.

Beyond sight and sound, smell and taste, were more esoteric senses. Those of magic, and those that tapped into the very flow of the world. For spellcasters, this came in the form of [Wisdom] and its descendants, but she had long attuned herself to such currents, and could feel the sea change as the dungeon was reborn around her. Depletion wasn't completely gone, of course, for there were still bits and pieces of tainted mana out there and the final red cores would have to be excised, but the source had been purged. Never again would it be a threat.

Now that the Fields of the dungeon were no longer full of depletion, no longer fighting them, it was easy to slide her senses past the net of spatial expansion and cast her gaze upon the world outside the dungeon. Far, far above, or merely a thousand or so miles from the outside, a massive distortion in the world faded as Blue released his [Event Horizon]. Just in time for the fires of rebirth to blast up into the air, a fair imitation of a volcano lighting the night sky.

She blinked, and touched on the power of her moon, that slow and ageless drift across the heavens, looking down on the motion of the world below. Sometimes that perspective, which was not really sight but rather some distant interpretation of swirling currents, told her when trouble was brewing, when The Silver Woe would be needed. On rarer occasions, it gave her a glimpse of some other change, such as when Blue's stellar Affinity had rippled outward from the very first [Contained Star].

The changes that came with the redemption of the Great Dungeon went both deep and wide, rippling over continents that she hadn't been to in ages. It occurred to her that the world had never seen this Great Dungeon active, since she was the oldest thing she knew of and even in her childhood it had been a poisoned island. It was, as had happened so many times with Blue, a new thing.

"So do you control the dungeon, now?" She asked mildly, dropping down to stand on Blue's seed-ship, which had backed off from the cores by a few yards.

“Not exactly,” Shayma said, in fox form and touching the enormous stellar core while standing on the smaller white core next to it. “I think I could have, but it didn’t seem right. I just wanted to help restore it to how it should be.”

Ansaë nodded approval. It was refreshing to deal with Shayma and Blue, neither of whom thought of themselves as rulers-in-waiting. Such attitudes were depressingly common among mortals, though it was difficult to say whether it was even proper to call Shayma a mortal anymore.

“I’m actually a [Guide] now,” Shayma volunteered, and Ansaë tilted her head, because such a thing didn’t show up on Shayma’s Status.

“She’s got two Statuses now,” Blue put in. *“I think that second status is kind of like the Controller status the mage-kings have. Except, you know, special because it’s Shayma.”*

Shayma laughed at that, but Ansaë agreed with Blue. The fox-girl had started out with a Fate class, which was uncommon to begin with, and she certainly had built on that prestige.

Over the course of history, there had been relatively few people who had achieved any real sort of immortality. Most of those who had done so only managed to lose themselves, the transformation turning them into something enduring but ultimately less than they had been. Few of these living monuments, great obelisks or statues or gems, remained active, lost to the ages or turned upon by the civilizations they had meant to protect.

Others had tried to gain immortality in other ways, by perfecting their body or stealing years from others or transcending into a being of pure mana. Very few of these efforts had been successful and, of while some of them had been, people such as they were ended by The Silver Woe. Twisted deeds resulted in twisted people, and such immortals were never satisfied with anything less than ruling the world.

Blue and Shayma, though, were not like that. Despite Blue taking over massive swaths of land, it was clear he didn’t really like doing so, and he didn’t even really pay attention to what he’d absorbed unless he had to. Despite their immortality coming to them without what Ansaë would consider any particular struggle, they seemed to be well-suited for it. With the singular conflict for which Blue was uniquely suited over with, there would be plenty of time to rest, reflect, and look to the future.

Ansaë would be glad to have the both of them as fellow travelers on the road of eternity.