I was glad to see that a governing council had arisen in the nineteenth layer of Fyor, even if it wasn't quite what I had in mind. The fact that they were a circle of mages actually worked out for the best, though. I recalled that the dovah were most heavily concentrated as mages due to the council employing them to help with the various mining operations. Having them be an influential part of what would essentially come to be the 'ruling class' for a while could possibly help correct people's image of them.

As I thought about that, I took a brief look at the mana levels in the area. The appearance of the shadows in those first few hours made an impact, but even now, ten years later the levels were still high. As for the mana spire? It had barely even begun to show signs of self-repair.

"Katrina?" A voice called out into the darkness of a small home, a small light floating up the steps. "Are you reading again?" Through a nearby doorway, a weak light flickered in and out of being, barely sustaining itself.

"Yes, mama!" The sole occupant of the room, a small girl with dark red hair and pale skin, called out to her mother. In front of her was a large tome, while over her head hovered a dim flame, similar to a candle. The book in front of her seemed far more advanced than the child should be reading at her age, discussing advanced theories of magic.

However, as the mother opened the door, her plump figure walking in and seeing this scene, she only let out a helpless sigh. "Wherever did you get that one, huh?" She asked with a wry smirk.

"I told the magister at the library that I was borrowing it for someone." The girl smiled brightly, even amidst the darkness. "I swear, mama, I didn't lie. I just… might not have told them everything?" She held up a hand, her fingers barely spread apart as if to represent her point.

"How's it you can even understand all of this?" She asked, taking a few steps closer. The light emitting from the pendant around her neck far surpassed the little flame that Katrina had summoned, making the words on the page stand out even more. "I like to think myself a rather learned mage, and even I struggle with some of these topics."

"No offense, mama, but you make a far better enchantress than you do a mage." Katrina jested, her thumb lightly stroking the silver ring on her finger. It was the one thing that kept her alive on this floor, keeping any children her age alive. But even more specifically for her.

The mana siphons struck in many forms, confirming their existence as a solid fact to those of the Great Blue. First came the shadows, which stalked through the streets, conjured by the fear of the sudden darkness. Next came the storms, waves crashing in and destroying their port.

But the worst of the siphons was the third. A siphon that would still sometimes trigger to this day. The people had taken to calling it the mana blight. It was unknown if this was a true siphon, or just a side effect of being born in an area with such dense mana. However, those children born in the first few years following the start of Dusk would sometimes be struck with this blight.

For those children so affected, their bodies would be naturally weaker than those of their peers. The mana was infused so deeply within them that they could not even properly generate and manipulate ki, a fact only recently discovered. However, their affinity for mana was beyond any recorded individual. While this didn't necessarily mean they could understand magic more easily, it did mean that they could execute what they had learned with far greater ease than others.

Katrina was one such child of the blight. Her mother recognized the signs early, and modified the gravity ring. She added in an effect that would normally harm others, one that passively expelled small amounts of mana from the wearer's body. Since those from the blight were *too* attuned to mana, it was not uncommon for them to generate it beyond their means to contain. Such incidents typically turned violent, the children lashing out at anything they could. Some even directly removed their rings to end the pain.

"Yes, well, I do what I can." Her mother said, smiling softly as one hand gently landed on her daughter's shoulder. "Though, if I'm not mistaken, isn't that book about geometric magic, instead of runic?"

"That's right, mama." Katrina nodded her head. "This is the third of sir Kindra's volumes, the Book of Autumn's Wind."

That name seemed to bring back memories for Katrina's mother, who grabbed a nearby chair to join her daughter. "Did you already read through Spring's Rain, and Summer's Flame? When did you get the time for that?"

Katrina giggled softly at that. "I read them during school. Miss Beckett doesn't mind, as long as I'm still paying enough attention to my lessons."

"Well, whatever for? If you're aiming to be an elementalist, shouldn't you be working on runic magic instead? I doubt the lessons could possibly be any harder for that than the geometric path." For those lucky children who survived the blight, the elementalist became their ultimate path of salvation. It was the only advanced class available, and the best choice for those who had a weak body.

"Mama, I'm only eight. I still have plenty of time to learn runic magic later. Right now, I want to study this. I feel like something's not right here, and these books might hold an answer."

Katrina's words confused her mother, making her blink several times as she pondered. She knew that her daughter was brilliant, more so than anyone else her age that they had met. She rarely did things for no reason, and her reasons typically made sense, once she was given the time to explain it. "Alright, I give up… what's not right?"

"The siphons." Katrina said with a small sigh. "I've been monitoring the mana levels for the last three months through town. According to what I understand, the mana should be more than dense enough to trigger another siphon. It should be able to trigger fifty siphons, even, before the mana returns to normal levels."

"Let's not curse our blessings, perhaps?" Her mother spoke, a bit concerned at where this seemed to be going. She felt like she was starting to understand her daughter's concerns now.

"But that's just it, mama. I'm not sure that it is a blessing. In fact, the mana in this city has increased by nearly a tenth in the last three months. It's not normal."

"Okay, okay, let's say I believe that. I do, by the way, and it scares me. But even so, how could those books help you figure it all out?"

Katrina smiled towards her mother, happy to at least have the comfort of someone believing in her. "I think it's a naturally occuring ward, mama. And not a good one. It's gathering the mana that slowly builds up in this area, and preparing it. The mana levels haven't gone down because there *is* a siphon, but it doesn't have enough mana to trigger yet. I asked merchants that came in through the portal, and they said that the mana here felt a bit thicker than their city. That means…"

"It's isolated here, in this region. But… the books of four seasons. They are elemental magic." Her mother was still clearly confused, looking once again at the book on the desk.

"Right, but it also covers being able to identify the trace elements of mana by sense. That's what I'm focusing on. If I can get enough information, I might be able to analyze the ambient mana, and identify what sort of siphon is building."

"Right now, I know that there is a heavy water element involved, but no fire. Tomorrow, I planned to go to the port and test for wind elements, once I have the method down." As she said that, Katrina turned her head back to the book as well.

"You know it feels bad to have my eight year old daughter lecturing me, right?" Her mother tried to joke, her face still worried. "I need to go prepare enchantments… if a siphon is building, and it's related to water, that's enough for me to get started."

"Huh?" It seemed to be Katrina's turn to be confused, before her eyes lit up in realization. "Oh, of course! Banishment! If you can prepare a banishing magic to defend the area, then it won't

matter what sort of siphon is prepared. As long as you have enough mana to fuel your spells, nothing will be able to get through."

"That's the idea." Her mother replied with a confident nod, slowly standing up. "You just tell me what other elements to the siphon you're able to work out, and leave the rest to your ma."

"Alright, I'll do that, mama." Katrina nodded her head energetically. "But try to work fast. The siphon's power should be proportional to the amount of mana it takes to activate. With the amount of mana in the area, I can't imagine it will be long. The siphon might even be equivalent to a third ranked destructive spell."

"Don't try to scare me, then." Her mother huffed, turning and walking towards the door. "But for tonight, that's enough reading. I was just coming up to tell you that it was bedtime."

Katrina rolled her eyes with a small smile, closing the large book on the desk. The flame above her head flitted out as she walked towards her bed. "Yes, mama. Have a good rest."

Wait… that's Irena, isn't it? I asked, looking at the little girl I saw on my computer screen. I had gone searching specifically for her incarnation, wanting to see how she was doing. Yet, Katrina's personality threw me for a bit of a loop there. It was hard to match up a young, energetic girl like that with Irena, especially after they had been hit with a 'mana blight' from birth.

Yet, it seemed that this was indeed Irena. The system even identified her as such. But at the same time, if I had to guess, this was an incarnation Irena had full control for.

I remembered her telling me that she enjoyed living out different lives with her incarnations. The idea that she gets so 'in character' that she becomes unrecognizable isn't that hard to imagine. Even Aurivy took it as a personal challenge to try to find out who Irena's incarnation was without directly asking her.

Speaking of… I checked the map again, running a search for Thessa and Rache. Their parts in the plan technically ended when I destroyed the spire. As such, whether they came up with a reason to return to the city, or sacrificed their incarnations to do something else was entirely up to them.

As it turned out, both of them had returned to the city. I focused in on Rache, running back the clock to see what had happened with them. I would have done so on Thessa, but given that Rache is the one actively controlled by a goddess all the time, she seemed a safer bet.

From the looks of the history, it seemed that they walked into town just a couple days after the darkness began. They were in tears, talking about how their ship had gone down in the

darkness, and how I had been killed buying them the time they needed to escape. Ever since then, they had been working with the people to try to help wherever they could.

Thessa had taken up a construction job, while Rache was a teacher. As it turned out, the full name of her incarnation was Rache Beckett. And given how she paid attention to her students, it seemed that she had a suspicion about who Irena's incarnation was… coincidentally the girl sitting in front of Katrina. A rather sad young woman who had lost her father to the second siphon. I had to admit that her personality did fit a bit more with Irena than Katrina's.

Sorry, Aurivy. Looks like you guessed wrong this time.