

Chapter 5: Exodus

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From set *The Brothers' War*

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Read the roots, tell the tale

Future forms in waving weeds

Higher than truth is hope

—*Rootwater Saga*

Before that rain-soaked morning, Nissa had spent a grand total of fifteen minutes on Dominaria—fifteen minutes of screaming at the closest friends she had. Chandra. Gideon. She'd had enough of being manipulated by Liliana and had enough of her friends blithely going along with it. *I can't bear to see another plane broken before I make my own home whole*, Nissa told them. *I'm sorry, but my watch is over.*

Now she was back, along with Chandra. Dominaria wasn't yet broken, but Nissa got the sense, sitting at the meeting room table across from Kaya and Saheeli, both haggard and exhausted, that the plane was careening toward its breaking point.

"Things are happening fast," said Chandra. "Sorin and Arlinn are working together to shore up Innistrad's defenses. Samut has gone into hiding with Hazoret and the population of Amonkhet. At the same time, others are answering Jace's call for help. Some guy named Tyvar arrived just before we left."

"Tyvar Kell," said Kaya.

"Oh, you know him. Is he allergic to shirts or something?"

"Chandra, focus," said Nissa.

"Right," Chandra said. "When everything's set on Ravnica, Jace and company are coming here to rendezvous with Teferi and all of you. Then the strike teams leave for New Phyrexia while Liliana and I wait here as backup."

"How long do we have?" asked Saheeli, exchanging a troubled look with Kaya.

"Jace has it on good authority that the Mirrans are going to launch their offensive very soon," said Chandra. "It could be today or tomorrow. According to Vivien, Urabrask and the rebel Phyrexians are nearly ready as well. I don't know about anyone else, but I'm ready for some action right now."

Of course she was. Leaping before looking—that was the Chandra way.

Nissa, on the other hand, wanted to know more. She'd spent the last several months fulfilling her obligations to Zendikar. The goings-on in the wider Multiverse hadn't concerned her as much as the healing of her own plane. As of late, she'd been chasing down an ancient thresher beast unwittingly let loose by imprudent adventurers from the ruins of the Guul Draz Skyclave. She was in hot pursuit of the ravenous creature when Chandra showed up telling tales of planes Nissa had never heard of.

"What exactly are you doing on Dominaria?" Nissa asked.

"We're helping Teferi find information about how to use the sylex," said Saheeli.

"The sylex." Chandra stared into her empty cup, a grim expression on her face. "The thing that Jaya died for." Jaya Ballard? Nissa had spent days on Ravnica with Chandra learning all she could about who and what the Phyrexians were. They'd spent time talking together, eating together. Never did Chandra mention anything about Jaya's death.

"We're close," said Kaya, "but we need more time."

"You have until Jace gets here."

Kaya clenched her jaw. "Not good enough." Kaya related the details of her time on Kaldheim, home of the World Tree that connected the plane's various realms, and of encountering a Phyrexian creature there. Then she talked of meeting with Vivien Reid, who'd told them about Elesh Norn's secret strategy—a way to bind the planes to New Phyrexia. The conclusion wasn't hard to piece together after that. "If the Phyrexians have created their own tree, we'll need something powerful to destroy it," Kaya explained. "We have nothing without the sylex."

"Our best chance to destroy the Phyrexians is to team up with the Mirrans," Chandra insisted. "We can't pass that opportunity up."

"We are going as fast as we can," said Saheeli.

"Hold on," said Nissa. "Let's say we are able to destroy the World Tree. What happens to New Phyrexia?"

"I'm not sure," said Kaya. "If the tree is as deeply rooted as Kaldheim's, then it's not out of the question that the whole plane might go when the tree does."

Chandra had a more definitive take: "Good."

"How can you say that?" said Nissa. "The Mirrans are there fighting for their home!"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," said Saheeli. "We have no evidence that the sylex can detonate an entire plane. It was used on Dominaria millennia ago, and the plane still exists. We have to trust Teferi."

"I do trust him," said Chandra. "My point is that destroying the Phyrexians is the most important thing. No cost is too high."

Saheeli slid her chair away from the table and stood up. "I've already accepted that the lives of my loved ones may come at others' expense. But I will not give into bloodlust."

"I didn't. That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?" snapped Nissa. She instantly regretted how harshly that came out. Why were things always so difficult between them, no matter how much they cared for each other?

Before Chandra could answer Nissa's query, Teferi appeared in the doorway. He was gaunt, looking like a corpse as he leaned on the doorframe.

"I'm ready," he said quietly, casting a kind but weary glance over to Nissa.

Kaya adjourned the meeting. She and Saheeli accompanied Teferi away from the room, leaving Chandra and Nissa by themselves. Nissa knew Chandra well enough to know that her silence was a brace holding back her vitriol. She could guess what Chandra would say next: *They didn't let me explain! They don't understand! Why can't they be sensible?*

"I didn't " said Chandra, averting her eyes away from Nissa. "This probably makes me sound like a monster, but I want them all to die. All of them. Anything having to do with Phyrexians or Phyrexia. They don't deserve any mercy."

"You're not a monster," said Nissa. "But you're also not someone who revels in death."

"But I want them to suffer. They killed Jaya! Don't you understand that?"

"I do," said Nissa. "But like it or not, Ajani is one of them. Does he get thrown to the slaughter with the rest?"

"That's unfair, and you know it."

Chandra became silent. She sat at the table for a time, her hands folded on the table in front of her. Then, without so much as a murmur, she got up and left the room.

The Phyrexian attack came in the dead of night.

Despite their dwindling numbers, the Phyrexian troops that survived Elspeth and Jodah's flanking attack pressed forward into the siege line, where they either got hung up on the barricade or funneled into pockets where equally relentless metal soldiers defending the tower tore into them. For the few that managed to cross the tower threshold, Nissa, Wrenn, and a handful of construct guardians were there to ensure they advanced no further.

"I'm losing my grip!" Nissa shouted over her shoulder. From across the room, Wrenn cast a spell, causing the end of the vine looped around the Phyrexian soldier's ankle to swell and harden until it snapped off its entire foot. The soldier toppled to the ground, allowing a clay statue to batter the Phyrexian with its club-like arms until it stopped moving. Over two dozen Phyrexians had met with similar fates in the tower hall, their bodies strewn about in various states of dismemberment. It seemed that victory for the defenders was all but assured.

"We beat them," she said, leaning on her knees. "Wrenn, we won."

Suddenly, a pillar of light scorched the sky outside the tower like a sun ascending, roaring fiercely over the sounds of battle. A moment later, a wave of steam blanketed the vale, engulfing enemy and ally alike. Nissa turned away from the heat, but Wrenn seemed unfazed; she and Seven stood in the middle of the tower's great hall, a limp Phyrexian soldier bent in half at Seven's feet.

Once the heat subsided, Nissa and Wrenn hurried out past the front courtyard, all the way up to the barricade. Phyrexian limbs dangled from still-smoldering spikes. Black, rank-smelling oil covered the metal soldiers, the ghostly golden glow of their eyes like pale will o' wisps floating in the gloom. And then the quiet—after the clang of weapons and the cacophony of screams echoing through the cavernous hallways of the tower had ceased, there was only the steady patter of rain on the dirt.

"Elspeth and Jodah," said Nissa. "I'm going to find them." She began to descend the steps, but Wrenn had Seven moved and block her path.

"Our role remains the same: to guard Teferi," said Wrenn.

"But " But *nothing* . Wrenn was right. For all anyone knew, there was no one to be found. That blast was no simple light display. Sadly, if Elspeth and Jodah were out there, they were in all likelihood consumed by the magic, their lives given to protect the tower and all inside. Now the duty of getting Teferi and the sylex to New Phyrexia rested on her and Wrenn. "Okay," she said, her head hung in mourning. "Let's regroup with the others at the workshop."

Just as they started to move, explosions again rocked the tower halls. Nissa glanced back out into the front courtyard, but nothing looked different from the moment before. The metal soldiers stood as silent sentinels over the gore-covered battlefield. Where was the noise coming from?

"Above," said Wrenn.

Above and all around. Nissa gazed at the staircase. "Let me go up and see. Wait here and make sure nothing gets through." Wrenn gave the go-ahead, and Nissa scrambled all the way up to the second floor, to a wide hangar open to the elements. Jodah had sent out the thopter fleet from this location, which was now empty save for a few thopters in disrepair.

As below, so it was above on the western flank of the tower. Calm. Still. Not so to the east, toward the paths leading to the wild fields that approached the city of Argivia. The eastern watchtowers had come to life, spraying electrostatic bolts upward into the clouds, creating a false aurora that lit up the night with ribbons of bright green. Out of the haze emerged a battalion of knights, more than a hundred strong and fully outfitted in identical white suits of armor. Above them flew what at first Nissa thought was an angel. Perhaps it had been at one time. No longer. This winged monstrosity was composed of brindled strands of blood-red muscle except for its helmet, a hulking pyramid of stripped bone resting upon its shoulders.

Watching the advancing army, Nissa could only think of the Gatewatch—the original four—facing down the Eldrazi threatening to tear Zendikar asunder. There was camaraderie there, a clear sense of doing right. A naïve sense—Nissa understood that enough now. Still, she longed for the confidence that Gideon could instill in her, the fervor that only Chandra could stoke, balanced with Jace's calm under duress. But none of them were there. Jace was on Ravnica frantically preparing. Chandra left earlier in the day to join him. And Gideon He wasn't coming.

But you're here, she told herself. She took one more moment for herself and then ran back down to Wrenn. "Another wave of Phyrexians!" she cried.

"How many?"

"A whole army," she said. "If they get too close, we can't prevent them from entering the tower."

Wrenn stood tall. "Then we will stop them."

Nissa turned and led the way back out, not straight to the eastern fortifications but into the front courtyard. The best thing to fight an army was an army of your own. Luckily, she still had the semblance of one at her command.

"Arise!" Nissa screamed, recalling the control word Elspeth used to manage the mechanical army. Elspeth's plan had worked to preserve a large percentage of the defending garrison. The beetle-like metal soldiers numbered several dozen, and she counted six clay statue units still on their feet. They stomped to signal their attention and faced her. "Assemble and march!" she ordered, waving them on to follow her around the perimeter of the tower to meet the incoming force.

As before, the metal soldiers trudged in perfect time, pummeling the rain-soaked ground of the tower's greenbelt until it was a black sludge. They lined up on top of a low battlement on the eastern edge of the tower complex. Slinking through the tight spaces between soldiers, Nissa stepped up to the front of the battlement to survey the scene.

The Phyrexians had advanced close enough for Nissa to discern their ghastly armaments: blades and shields the color of bare bone, sinewy red at their edges. The angelic abomination hovered above the foot soldiers, gesticulating for what Nissa recognized as a complex protection spell. Sure enough,

whenever turret fire came close to the enemy ranks, the bolts hit an invisible barrier and dissipated harmlessly.

Fortunately, elementals wouldn't be slowed down by such a barrier. Nissa reached her consciousness out to the earth and the air, inviting the spirits of the plane to inhabit bodies made of dirt and stone, wind and rain. Air currents began to stir. The earth between the armies bubbled and churned. *Defend yourself, Dominaria!*

But upon sensing the presence of the nature spirits, she experienced something she never had before. They recoiled at her presence. *Now is the time to show your strength!* Nissa implored. They'd heard her—she could feel it—but her appeals went unanswered.

She looked to Wrenn. "Do you feel that? My magic "

"Yes. The leylines are tangled. Intentionally, I believe."

The Phyrexian army loomed ever closer. There was no more time to wait. The enemy couldn't be allowed to reach the battlements—there would be no way to stop them from infiltrating the tower at that point. If nature would not heed her call, Nissa would have to march onto the battlefield with a legion of machines. But as adept as Saheeli's troops were at fighting, they were empty husks in comparison to the enemies advancing toward them. To Nissa in that moment, the Phyrexians were the crest of a wave meant to overwhelm not only the tower, but all bastions of life and hope everywhere, from Lorwyn to Innistrad to her beloved Zendikar.

With crushing force.

With hidden corruption.

With soul-destroying despair.

Nissa unsheathed the thin, tapered sword hidden in her staff and raised it into the air. "Forward!" she ordered. The mechanical soldiers, followed by lumbering clay statues, led the way down the rampart and onto the field. "Stand your ground! Defend the tower!"



Art by: Chris Cold

The constructs assembled into a siege line into which the Phyrexians charged. The armies collided with sharp staccato thunderclaps. Metallic edges on both sides clanged against armor, searching for weak spots to bite, rip, and tear apart the enemy. The constructs, of course, did not feel fear, but the Phyrexians—their faces either obscured by helmets or replaced by smooth, featureless bone—did not relent, either. Worse, unlike the black-armored forces that had attacked earlier in the night, this white-armored legion showed a semblance of battle tactics. Gone were the berserker charges that left the enemy overextended. These Phyrexians were organized into squads of four or five, working together to pin down the machine warriors and attack from positions of strength.

The clay statues did not fare much better. After the first few Phyrexians lost their weapons in the statues' earthen flesh, they began to instead focus on quick jabbing attacks at the statues' weakest points—their legs. Two had already been tipped over into the mud by Phyrexians crushing the statues' feet and ankles with their heavy shields.

Wrenn tried to manage the battlefield by channeling her internal fire into a burning labyrinth of twisting, flaming corridors, splitting the Phyrexian line into vulnerable pockets for the construct warriors to charge into. But the stress of maintaining her spells while holding her ground against more and more enemies was clearly taking its toll. One Phyrexian swung its heavy blade onto the head of a construct, cutting it down and opening an avenue to attack Wrenn and Seven.

Nissa sprang forward, and sliding underneath the Phyrexian's swing, slashed her own weapon, only for it to glance off the bony plates protecting its abdomen. Back up on her feet, she narrowly dodged two more hefty swings before the Phyrexian pressed the attack. This time, she sidestepped its overhead smash and risked casting a simpler spell on the ground underneath its feet. The loose earth writhed, small plants and roots awakening to suck the Phyrexian's legs down into the muck. From there, a gang of mechanical soldiers finished it off.

Nissa once again gazed upward. The flying Phyrexian had hardly moved, content to maintain its vigil above the fighting, weaving protective spells to help its troops defend and recover from attacks. The strategy was a sound one: Grind the tower defenders down until none were left. Then take all those within the tower with ease. Even without magical support, the numbers did not favor Nissa and her allies. With it? No chance of victory. She had to take the general down.

Wrenn. Nissa broke out into a sprint headed straight for Wrenn, ducking underneath Seven's sweeping boughs. "Wrenn! I need your help!"

"I'm somewhat occupied currently," Wrenn said as Seven kicked a Phyrexian over. "But I'm listening."

"The leader," she said, pointing upward. "I'm going to take it down."

"Your proposal?"

"A little gift of strength from me to you. Then I can climb Seven and go from there."

A rare smile appeared on Wrenn's face. "An acceptable plan."

Nissa pressed her hands to Seven's trunk, lending the strength from her own limbs into theirs. In so doing, she tapped into the wild inferno Seven helped Wrenn contain within her body. Nissa felt her lifeforce intermingle with the flames, but instead of being overwhelmed, Nissa found renewed magical energy—a leyline all its own. She channeled that newfound power into her spell, commanding Wrenn and Seven to grow. Grow stronger. Taller. Her spell in full effect, she felt one of Seven's leafy branches embrace her as if she were no larger than a mouse in an ogre's hand.

"It will see you coming if you climb," said Wrenn. "Seven, make her fly."

In one fluid movement, the now giant-sized Seven launched Nissa skyward, hurling her with such force that the rain stung her face like pinpricks. The winged Phyrexian twisted in mid-air, its awkward movements betraying its surprise at Nissa's unorthodox attack. Though it hoisted up one of its scythe arms to slash at her, she was faster and lighter. Hooking one arm around the creature's neck, Nissa jammed her sword deep into an unarmored section on the right side of its body. The creature swung its arms wildly to shake her off, but Nissa stubbornly held on.

Unable to throw her free, the Phyrexian commander stopped flailing, extended its wings fully, and began to ascend at frightening speed. Down below, the battlefield became a frantic lather of insects crawling over each other, then dots, and then nothing as she and the Phyrexian crossed into the darkness of the storm clouds. The cold air stung her eyes, forcing them closed.

No! She would not permit the Phyrexian leader to re-establish contact with its troops. It would threaten no more of her friends, nor would its nightmarish machinations touch one more blade of grass on Dominaria, Zendikar, or anywhere else. Nissa tightened her arm around the Phyrexian's neck. Reaching down, she pulled her sword free from its ribcage and then thrust upward, skewering the knot of cables at the base of its wing again and again and again and again, the itchy warmth of its black blood coating her hand. The Phyrexian arched its back, trembling frantically as her sword's enchantment began to take effect. With each stab, she'd implanted a seed within the Phyrexian, and now, in the frigid Dominarian night, she beckoned the seeds to bloom.

Seedlings burst forth in a symphony of ripping flesh and cracking bone. Her enemy thrashed its arms and wings in vain; the seedlings had wrapped themselves around Nissa's limbs, helping her resist any attempt to shake her off. The Phyrexian began to fall, taking Nissa with it.

All Nissa could do was hold on. Within a few moments, the battlefield came back into view, morphing from pinpoints of light, to beetles struggling against teeth, to the chaotic churn of blood and oil. With only a thought's breadth to decide, Nissa bade her seedlings to let go. As she fell, she tried to collect herself enough to planeswalk. But her thoughts splintered, stretched among the recalcitrant spirits of nature, her friends inside the tower, the gulf left when she'd departed Zendikar, and, increasingly, her own impending death.

Nissa closed her eyes and prepared for impact, only to unexpectedly feel a truss of soft leaves under her back. Seven had extended their branches to catch her. Unfortunately, this opened their flank to the enemy. Cold, cold hands reached up for Nissa from beneath and tightened their fingers around her arms, her legs, jerking her onto the ground. She struggled to reach her feet, but each time she made progress, what seemed like a thousand armored limbs dragged her back down.

Help! Help us! she called out—not with her voice, as her breath was being pressed out of her lungs, but with her mind. She felt herself sink into the ground, past the dirt and the roots, past the bedrock upon which the mountains rested, and still farther down into the innermost parts of the plane where she hoped to find its essence—the Worldsoul.

Why don't you answer? Nissa screamed. *Can you not hear us?*

Only silence followed. Nissa couldn't understand. On Zendikar, the Worldsoul was as close to her as her own breath. It communed with her. Trusted her. On Innistrad and Amonkhet, the Worldsouls were hostile; on Ravnica it was hidden; but on every plane it was at least *there*. Here, on Dominaria, it was as if a rot had festered deep inside the plane. No, not a rot—a *hatred* born of wounds unhealed and betrayals never rectified. The nature spirits who'd spurned her earlier made their presences known:

You are not one of Gaea's children, they said in unison.

Gaea? Yes, that was the name the Worldsoul had chosen for itself. Nissa could sense Gaea close by, watching how she responded to the judgment of her agents who held dominion over Dominaria's untouched wilds.

There are invaders upon your plane , Nissa implored. You must help us defeat them!

The blighted ones have returned. We know.

Visions invaded Nissa's mind of dozens—hundreds—of battles taking place that same night. Massive, gray-skinned warriors led by stained-glass angels battling back Phyrexian horrors boiling up from the city sewers. Elven lords bedecked in warpaint riding atop metal war machines while human mages in flight hurled spells down upon many-horned beasts. Minotaurs desperately defending their sacred stone halls from biomechanical monstrosities, aided by goblin peasants showing no fear. Was this the nadir of Dominaria, the time just before its end?

You are a meddler come to drain Gaea's strength when her children need it.

I am a protector! Nissa said. *See for yourself!* She opened her mind fully, allowing all to see and feel Zendikar through her. Her memories replayed as if she'd been a disembodied spirit witnessing all the parts of her life. From her first encounter with the soul of Zendikar, to defeating hordes of Eldrazi, to unleashing the healing power of the Lithoform Core. *If any of our homes are to be saved, it must start here! Help us, and we will end the Phyrexians—once and for all!*

You are oathbreakers . . .

How dare you recreate our doom . . .

The silver one promised to take the sylex away . . .

Nissa sought an egress from the darkness but found none. *Whatever promise Karn made to you doesn't matter anymore! Your enemies are upon you!* So dark. Quiet, like a tomb. But within this void, Nissa found clarity. If this was her final night as Nissa Revane, she resolved to die fighting in the name of Zendikar. No—in the name of life on all planes.

If you won't lend your aid, then return me to my fate. I will do it myself.

That was when she heard it—a faint rumble that steadily intensified into a roar that pressed upon her soul. *Gaea has judged you* , the spirits proclaimed, and in that moment, she felt a force reach into her and emerge through her as a moth from a chrysalis. The mana of the plane opened to her. Nissa's arms and legs became the roots of mighty oaks. Her hair became the wind, sharp as thorns. Her body became the ground, teeming with animals, insects, and plants alike. And then her heart.

Her heart became the wrath of Gaea, a simmering anger that boiled and frothed like a choleric tide washing over the entire vale. Life energy found new receptacles in the bodies of the fallen—both mechanical fighters and mangled Phyrexians. Gaea's would-be destroyers now reassembled themselves, their bodies of steel transmuted to heartwood, oil and powerstones converted into a circulatory system through which energy-rich sap flowed. With uncanny grace, the mass of elemental warriors embarked upon their procession toward the battlefield to fight for the survival of the plane.

Nissa sensed that this was not the first time Dominaria's Worldsoul had touched Phyrexia. Becoming one with the enemy was to invite it into you, to fathom its true motivations. Nissa's questions about the Phyrexians were answered. Flashes of history showed her how they arose, their attempts to take Dominaria for their own, and their aims that ran counter to everything natural.

All Nissa could do in response was scream.

Slowly, sensation began to creep back into her awareness, first a tingling at her extremities, then all at once flaring into all-consuming agony throughout her body. Such anguish she'd never felt before. Such hatred she'd never thought possible emanating from her heart. Her eyes shot open. Only a fraction of a second seemed to have elapsed since she was pulled onto the ground, bone white appendages reaching down to seize her.

But in that moment, everything had changed.

She lunged out on instinct, willing the ground underneath her to churn and strike out at her attackers. This time, the elements immediately bent to her command as if they were extensions of her own body. Earthen tendrils burst upward, forcing away the Phyrexians crowding around her. Nissa came to her feet in time to witness Gaea's protectors pouring down the tower ramparts. They flooded the battlefield, engaging the remaining Phyrexians in a titanic crash.

In the chaos, Nissa spotted Wrenn and Seven striding toward her, sweeping Phyrexians away from their path. When they got close, Seven scooped Nissa up with a bough and held her as they ran back toward the tower's battlements.

"A dirge drifts in from the mountains," said Wrenn. "We must return to Teferi."

"I know," Nissa said. Peering between Seven's branches, she could see the elemental fighters holding the bone-clad Phyrexians at bay like an undulating wall, each fallen enemy being subsumed by Gaea's will and raised as a warrior for her cause. It was as glorious as it was terrifying. Nissa understood the sacrifice that it took, for even a Worldsoul was not infinite. In other parts of the plane, Dominaria's heroes fought against Phyrexian invaders. The presence of the spirits here meant they were not elsewhere to aid others. Thousands would not see the morning.

When they reached the battlement, it was eerily deserted. Motionless. Seven placed Nissa onto the ground, and together, she and Wrenn watched the struggle on the battlefield. Earlier, Nissa had felt it—the flow of life intermingling with the Phyrexian yearning for destruction. It was a microcosm of their fight against all Phyrexians everywhere.

"Nissa, we are not alone."

Nissa followed Wrenn's eyeline to the base of the tower. Dragging itself toward them was the Phyrexian angel, its wings clipped and spine shattered, the hilt of Nissa's sword still protruding from its back. The green seedlings had flourished into vines wrapping themselves around the general's body like a new skin. With irresistible vigor, Nissa stepped forward, her hand extended. She curled her fingers, urging the vines to tighten.

"Do your masters experience sensation through you?" she asked the Phyrexian. "Do they feel it when I squeeze? I want them to know what we are going to do to them—to all of you. Not a simple end, no." She squeezed harder. Vines coiled around the Phyrexian's neck and began to twist.

"Nissa, stop," said Wrenn. "Yours is not a song of cruelty!"

No, but it must be. Those voices in Nissa's head. The spirits. *We know this enemy, and in your heart, we see that it has already claimed those you love. They are forever lost. Victory over the blighted ones will require your hands to bear the blood of friend and foe alike.*

With those final words, the spirits departed, and with them left the rage. Nissa staggered forward a step, a gulp in her throat set free. Gaea had shown her what Phyrexians did if left unchecked—they invaded, subsumed, transformed, and then feasted. That knowledge did not go away; she'd see it in her dreams for the rest of her days. Nissa stared at the Phyrexian on the ground in front of her. No matter how broken it was, coursing through its limbs was glistening oil, a foul seed from which Phyrexia

could always emerge. Perhaps the same was true for Ajani, for Karn if he'd been turned, for any others corrupted by the Phyrexians. When the time came to do what was necessary to protect the Multiverse, she would have to be decisive. She would have to be the hand that moved for those who could not.

Nissa closed her eyes and clenched her fingers tight. The vines obeyed her command.

When Wrenn and Nissa reached Saheeli's workshop, the stone wall around the door had been torn open, pushing aside the metal door and barricade. They stepped through into the chamber. Black smoke, the kind that burned with every breath, permeated the room. Through the haze, Nissa could make out more figures than the two she was expecting, all surrounding the Temporal Anchor.

Her heart sank at the thought that Phyrexians had gotten past the defenses. Nissa summoned wind to blow the smoke away and prepared to call upon Gaea's elementals one more time to smash their enemies. But when the smoke lifted, Nissa saw that at least one of the figures was someone she knew.

"Nissa," said Nahiri, her hands raised in supplication. "Stand down."

"Why are you here?" said Nissa, maintaining the swirling winds above their heads.

"Because I asked her to be," said Jace, stepping into view. "We can't afford to turn away any allies in this fight. I hope you understand." His words were stern, but his expression was one of contrition. In the days before Nissa came to Dominaria, Jace had reached out to her to meet and talk—invitations she'd left unanswered. She knew that she couldn't let Chandra be their go-between forever. They'd have to talk their differences out eventually, but right now, there were more important matters to attend to.

Nissa dismissed the winds while stealing a glance at Nahiri to see her reaction. The kor was as stone-faced as ever. Closer to the Temporal Anchor were Saheeli and Kaya, both surveying extensive damage to the machine. Wires and circuitry spilled out of gashes in the anchor's charred metal frame, like guts from a corpse. Debris packed the middle, as if the anchor had been crushed into itself. "What happened?"

"The powerstone imploded and overloaded the anchor," said Saheeli, lifting wreckage away from the machine. "I tried to hold it together, but the strain was too much."

"And Teferi?" Jace asked. "Did he find out how to make the sylex work?"

Kaya shook her head. "He did, but some things still don't make sense. It took everything I had just to maintain contact. A mess of words and images. I think I understand how to activate the sylex, but we should ask him directly."

"Where is he?"

"There." Kaya pointed to the stasis capsule at the center of the anchor.

Nissa, Wrenn, Nahiri, and Jace aided Saheeli and Kaya to clear a path to the stasis capsule. Once that was done, Kaya was the first to step in.

"Teferi," she said, knocking on the hollow shell. "Are you okay?" After not hearing an answer, she leaned in closer and wiped the grime away from the small porthole in the capsule's door. Cupping her hands around her face, she peered inside. "I can see him, but it's dark. Wait—something's wrong."

"What?" said Jace, pushing his way forward. Nissa followed close behind and saw at the same time Jace did. Teferi was inside, his eyes closed, a distressed expression on his face. He looked so pale and sickly. No, that wasn't it. He was disappearing before their eyes. She and Jace reached for the door release at the same time, only for Wrenn to call out for them to stop.

"Teferi's chord is still tethered to this device," said Wrenn. "It reverberates with his song. You must not disturb it."

Jace stepped back and concentrated, reaching out his mind to Teferi's. "Wrenn is right. He's still there, but stretched, as if across distant places. Or different times."

Saheeli began to pace, speaking to no one in particular. "I could try to rebuild the anchor again. Maybe reverse the systems to draw him forward through the timestream." She stopped and looked at Jace. "How long do we have left?"

"No time," Jace said with a frown. "Kaya, without Teferi—"

"I can do it," Kaya shot back. "I'll get the sylex to work."

"We can't just leave him," Nissa protested. "The Phyrexians are all over this plane. They're going to come back here."

"The Mirran attack is almost underway," said Nahiri. "That's why we're here now—to gather you and leave for New Phyrexia."

"We can't let him die alone," said Nissa.

"Not alone," called out a voice from the doorway. Leaning against the broken doorframe was Jodah, grimacing while holding his midsection. "And not to die. If I let that happen, he'd never let me hear the end of it."

A moment later, Elspeth stepped out from behind him, and draping his arm over her shoulder, supported him as they both shambled into the room. Nissa had no idea how they'd survived that blast, but it was apparent that they'd only barely done so. Guiding Jodah to a seat at one of Saheeli's worktables, Elspeth sat him down and pressed a small flask into his hand. Then she strode to the middle of the room.

"My name is Elspeth Tirel," she said, extending her hand to Jace.

"I know." Jace took her hand, a gleam in his eye Nissa recognized. He'd felt Elspeth's mind long before she made her appearance. "Jace Beleren."

"You are going to New Phyrexia."

"We are. Once we're done here."

"Then I'm coming with you. You'll need someone who knows the lay of the land."

"And your companion?" said Jace, eyeing Jodah with an expression Nissa could only describe as discomfort. "I I can't—"

"Do you think you're the first mind-mage I've dealt with, Beleren?" Jodah said with a venom-laced smirk. "You're neither the first, nor the best. But give it a few hundred years, and maybe you'll get there." His eyes strayed to the capsule housing Teferi, the smile fading from his face. "I am Jodah, Archmage of Dominaria, and right now, my aim is helping my friend. I'll work on freeing Teferi while you lot go off to the most awful place in the Multiverse. Sound good?"

"I didn't mean to offend you."

"Don't worry about being polite," Jodah said. "Worry about being careful, for your companions' sake."

"I will remain here as well," said Wrenn. "My dealings with Teferi are not concluded."

Soon, others began to planeswalk in. Vraska in green and black armor befitting the Golgari queen; The Wanderer, elegant and fierce, accompanied by a young man with a shorn head whom she introduced as Kaito Shizuki; Tyvar, still with no shirt; and finally, a grizzled, distant man, graying at the temples, with a jaw clenched as he took in the rubble-strewn environment.

“Lukka, this is Nissa Revane.”

“Hmm,” was all Lukka said, paying her minimal attention.

“And Chandra?” Nissa asked Jace. Chandra had left Dominaria earlier in the day with a promise to return. Where was she?

“Kaladesh,” Jace replied. “To visit her mother before coming back here.”

Nissa nodded. To wait with Wrenn and Liliana and the others. To see if they would come back. It was understandable. Still, Nissa had hoped to see Chandra again before marching into hell, if only to settle things after their heated conversation that morning. To tell her that she had a point. To tell her that she cared. But that would have to wait, like her matters with Jace. Suspended inside a pause.

Everyone made their final preparations before leaving. Saheeli promised to convey Nissa’s warmest regards to Pia and enjoy a stiff drink in Yahenni’s memory. Wrenn and Jodah conferred with each other on the next steps to bring Teferi back. Kaya traced her finger across the surface of the sylex, studying its symbols, before carefully wrapping it up for the journey ahead. Elspeth introduced herself to the other Planeswalkers, informing them on what they could expect on New Phyrexia. Jace wove a spell establishing a telepathic link between all the strike team members. This way, they could locate each other, even over distance.

Nissa stood away from them all, preferring to meander among the wreckage of the Temporal Anchor. The Gatewatch had assembled once more. On Ravnica—the last time the original four members were together—they renewed their vows to the Multiverse, to each other. This time, though, was different. The quiet schisms between her and Jace, between her and Chandra, were laid bare, like wounds reopened. They wouldn’t be fixed by a mere recitation of familiar phrases. But they didn’t need to be.

Nissa watched all the others with her in the room, friends and strangers from multiple planes assembled just as the disparate people of Dominaria had come together, overcoming their divides and forging a united front. There was something beautiful in that. Something worthy. Something vital that Nissa had not considered. The struggle against the Phyrexians wasn’t simply pushing back against the sick plans enacted by a singular megalomaniac like Nicol Bolas, nor was it a task for Planeswalkers to undertake alone. All beings who hoped for any kind of future faced a choice: allow the Phyrexians to transform every plane into the bleak, charred wastelands Nissa witnessed through Gaea’s eyes, or fight alongside others who may once have been enemies.

Honoring their differences. Forging new bonds that would prevail and endure.

Jace announced that the time had come to leave, and everyone going to New Phyrexia gathered around him. Nissa walked toward the center of the room to join them, stopping momentarily when she noticed something small skittering around amid the debris. Kneeling down, she brushed away the ash and scrap to uncover a tiny artifact bird, for sure one of Saheeli’s creations. It had her meticulous craftsmanship sprinkled with a bit of playfulness. The bird hopped onto her finger, and Nissa lifted it up to take a closer look. It craned its neck, looked Nissa right in the eye, and let out a tiny metallic tone like the tinkling of morning dew dripping into a still pond.

“For the life of every plane,” she whispered, “We will all keep watch.”



Art by: Rovina Cai

Epilogue

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Teferi woke up on a beach on a warm day. The sand was fine and close packed, damp, only just now starting to dry. He breathed into the sand, blinking as the fine grains irritated his eyes.

A small crab walked across his hand, stopped before him, and blew bubbles. It scurried away.

He felt it walk across his hand.

He felt it.

Teferi sprang to his feet, brushing sand from his body. He was no longer a spirit. He was whole, but he was not in the Temporal Anchor. He felt

Fine. Rested. Confused, as if he had woken from a nap. He looked around, taking in the coast on which he stood.

The sea stretched out to the horizon, azure and glittering under the midday sun.

Inland, fine white sand stretched up the shore until it met green beachgrass and dunes. Old footprints showed people often walked here, though Teferi was alone right now. The low and placid coast arced away on either side of the dunes. To the left, the coast stretched for about a mile before rising into a rocky, vertical cliff. Shore trees clung to the cliff's pate, a windswept green thatch that collected mist and danced in the distance. To Teferi's right, the beach rolled along into the hazy distance.

Shore birds hovered overhead, riding the steady ocean breeze.

"Kaya," Teferi said. He frowned. He felt his voice vibrate through his throat, heard it with his ears under the soft roar of the coast wind. There was no connection; he had just spoken her name aloud.

The severity of his situation thrummed through him, carried in the sound of the rushing of his blood once more through his physical body.

If he couldn't connect to Kaya, he couldn't connect to the Temporal Anchor. If he couldn't connect to the Anchor, then he couldn't come home. Teferi could only hope that Kaya had gotten what she needed from his conversation with Urza. Did he remember feeling her presence there, or did he imagine that memory? Already he struggled to remember, already he began to forget. The river, subsuming the lake.

What had he forgotten? What did he do?

He only hoped Kaya had been able to get what they needed. If Kaya couldn't remember what he lost, then—

“No,” Teferi said, speaking only to himself and the shore birds.

This was not the time to panic; this was only a problem, just another obstacle to overcome. He looked up the beach, toward the old footprints in the sand. There were people here. If there were people, there was hope.

Teferi put his back to the ocean and started walking inland.