

Revolution Begins

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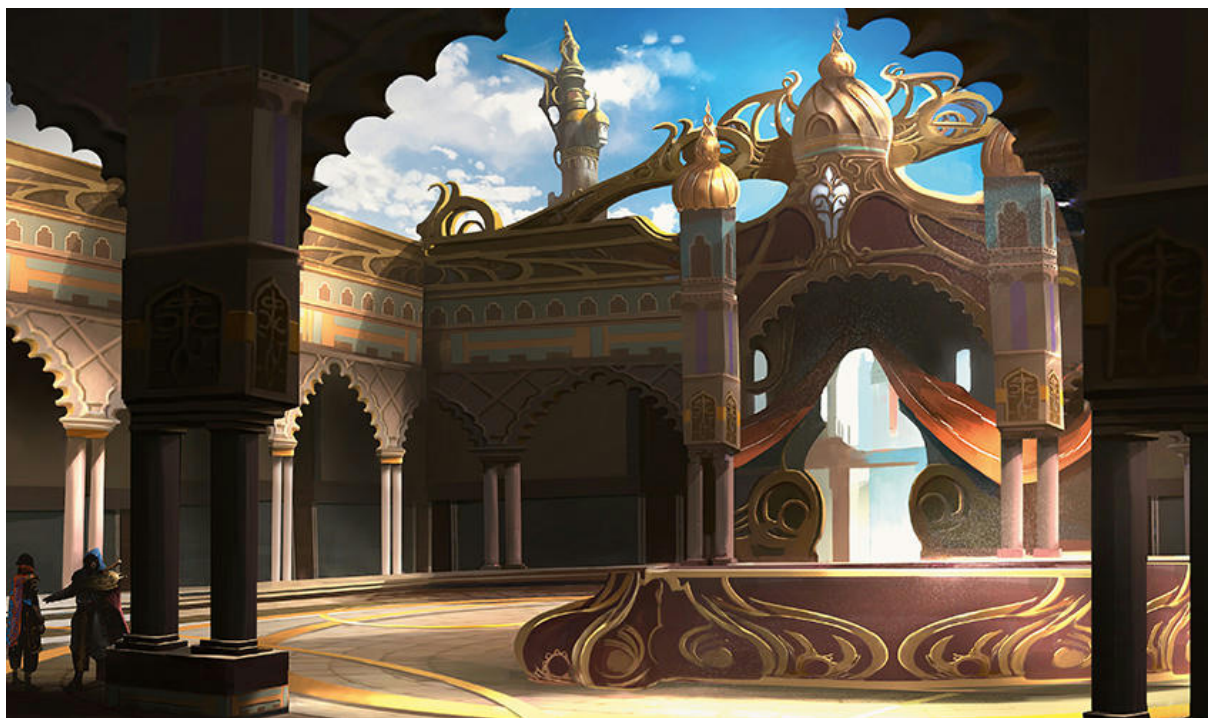
From set *Aether Revolt*

In a bid for power, Tezzeret installed himself as Grand Consul; now he holds the city of Ghirapur in his clutches. But there are those who refuse to stand for his tyranny. The renegade inventors plan to strike the Aether Hub. Victory would mean fuel for their inventions—and for their rebellion.



Ghirapur was constantly reinventing itself. Buildings were torn down all the time, and rebuilt stronger, taller, with better materials, better techniques. Almost every block, every square had seen some measure of renovation and repair within the last few years. The city had little room for history and less for nostalgia. In most parts of the city, the dust smelled of construction and sweat. There was never time for the scent of old wood and tarnished brass to settle in. Ghirapur left very little space for decay.

But there were places. Narrow alleys where too many shadows seemed to fall, spots where the permits for renovation kept failing to be approved, spaces that most simply circumnavigated out of habit. Chandra Nalaar followed closely behind her mother into one of these forgotten causeways, a hood pulled up over her hair, and her eyes cast firmly on the ground in front of her feet.



Concealed Courtyard | Art by Jung Park

“This place has been around for decades, you know.” Pia Nalaar’s voice was soft and even. “It’s belonged to an aetherborn family all that time; they’ve kept it intact. Kiran...we used to come here. A long time ago.”

Chandra didn’t look up. “Why are we here, mom?”

“Gonti keeps this place off the Consulate patrol routes. People sympathetic to what we need to do, we’ll find them here.” Pia looked up at the unmarked doorway and breathed in the scent of grease, smoke, and spice. The door swung easily open on well-oiled hinges, and a flood of sound and light spilled out onto the street.

Chandra pulled her hood back as she stepped into the club. Two dozen low round tables surrounded by cushions and small stools were set out in a wide semicircle around a small stage, raised only a foot off the floor; each table held a colorful lamp and was surrounded by people of all kinds engaged in whispered conversation.

On stage was a chikara player playing softly under low lights, a part of the ambiance rather than the focus on the room. Pia waved to him as she entered and raised two fingers, and the musician nodded in understanding.

“Look around you, Chandra.” Pia smiled. “Some of the best inventors, pilots, and thinkers in all of Ghirapur. They’re here brooding over what happened at the Fair, and they’re just waiting for a spark to get them moving. They’re rebellious by nature, but we need an actual rebellion.”

Chandra nodded. “So, what, you’re gonna give a little speech? Rile ‘em up a bit? Sounds like a plan.”

Pia smiled. “Actually, they’ve heard it all before from me. Renegade Prime and all that. They’re still on the fence, and they need to hear something different. Chandra, I want you to do it.”

Chandra opened her mouth, but no sound came out. She closed it, opened it, and tried again. “Mom, no. That’s not...The whole ‘inspiring oration’ thing does not work for me. Really. What would I even say? They don’t know me.”

“You’re wrong about that. They do know you. They know what you’ve already done here for us, and they know where you come from.” Pia waved again to the chikara player, who wrapped up his song, gave a small bow to small applause, and left the stage. “Just tell them what you feel. They already have enough reasons. They need someone to fan the flame.”

“Yeah, but...” Chandra stopped as she saw the faces of everyone in the club turn to her. Some hopeful, some despondent, some angry, some blank. But almost all of them smiled, just a bit, as they recognized her. “Yeah. Fan the flames. Doing it,” she muttered to herself as she stepped cautiously up onto the low stage.

“Hi. I’m, well, I guess you know who I am. Chandra Nalaar. Pia’s daughter.” A pause. “Um...Kiran’s daughter.” The words almost didn’t come, but she took another breath when she heard the murmurs and saw the nods of the crowd before her.

“Some of you probably knew him.” More nodding. “Some of you...I bet some of you maybe knew him better than I ever got to. And you know what? That’s not all right! That *you* got to know my dad, and I *didn’t*. That you got to work with him, talk to him, laugh with him, and I didn’t. They took him away from me. From my mom. And when she decided to fight back, you all just...you just *let* her. They took from her, so of course she’d fight. But you? Not yet. You let her fight alone, because they hadn’t taken *enough*.”

The crowd got a little louder. Some of them seemed offended, but none rose to leave. Chandra continued. “Well, today they took the rest. All your work, all your efforts, all your tools, everything. They took everything because that’s what they do. And you’re still sitting in here eating and drinking and complaining and not *doing* anything. What did they take from you? What else do they *have* to take?”

The words tumbled to a halt. She glared out at a mirror-sea of eyes and goggle lenses, faces scowling or impassive. “...Forget it,” she muttered. “I should go.”

People rose from their seats, arguing. Chandra stomped off the stage. “I’m sorry, mom. This was a bad idea. I...”

Pia smiled, and put a hand on her daughter’s shoulder. “Shh. Just wait.”

A furious young woman stalked up to Chandra, jabbing her finger into the air. “Yeah, sorry about your dad, but what are we supposed to do? They took my ship. The one thing I could have fought back with, I don’t have it anymore. You want me to fight? *How?*”

Her fists clenched. “*I—!*” Pia placed a stilling hand on the small of her back. She clamped her jaw shut in a clack of teeth, and felt the hairs rising at the nape of her neck.

The crowd grumbled its support for the woman. “They took all my tools. Stripped my whole workshop,” offered an elderly dwarf.

“Three years I spent working on my generator! And now they took it, all my blueprints, all my prototypes! I’ve got nothing!”

Patrons took to their feet, arguing amongst themselves, venting their complaints. The spark had caught quickly, and within minutes; the club threatened to become a riot, spilling out into the streets. The patrons had largely forgotten about Chandra, who sidled back to her mother, looking a bit hesitant.

“So...now what?”

“Well, now we...” Pia trailed off. “Oh. This was not part of the plan.”

An extravagantly dressed aetherborn flanked by a pair of armed bodyguards glided into the room from a back alcove. They waved their hand and almost immediately the crowd calmed, their anger doused with a chill of fear.

The aetherborn spoke quietly, almost at a whisper. “Friends, please. Such a display. You know as well as I do that this establishment is pledged to peace and prosperity. Normally, I would instruct the troublemakers to leave.” They turned to Pia, and the light of their eyes dimmed momentarily. “However. I was not unmoved by your complaints. Some of them might have merit. And I believe I can offer amelioration. Please, accompany me.” They gestured for Pia, Chandra, and a few other patrons to follow them into a back room. At the same time, guards stepped in front of the front door, their hands going to their weapons—not drawing them yet, but the statement was made. Chandra looked at Pia, wordlessly asking whether it was time to leave...dramatically. Pia shook her head.

Almost sheepishly, Chandra and the others followed the aetherborn into the back office. One of the bodyguards manipulated a switch hidden in the office’s ornate molding, and a narrow door swung open, revealing a tunnel and a descending set of stairs. The aetherborn went first, offering no further explanation.

The tunnel was narrow, but well-lit by small aether-lamps; rather than the damp, musty air one might expect from an underground passage, this one was warm, with the scents of half a dozen different styles of cuisine mingling together.

“I’ll regret asking, I’m sure, but where are you taking us?” The pilot fidgeted with her bracers, eyeing the narrow walls with some suspicion.

“You haven’t guessed? We’re going to have a conversation with the most secure individual in Ghirapur, in the most secure location. And we are going to come to a resolution that will preclude further disruption.”

“You’re taking us to Gonti.” It wasn’t quite a question.

Chandra froze. “*What?* Whoa, no. That’s not happening. Gonti sold us out once already. We’re leaving.” She raised glowing fists. “I’ll make my own exit if I need to.”

The aetherborn turned their head to the side quizzically. “Pyromancy in a narrow, flammable hallway? It’s not so desperate as that. Besides, we’re here. You can take your objections up with Gonti directly.” They pressed open a door, revealing an opulent office. A single aetherborn sat at the head of a long table, fingers arched before them.

“You took longer than expected. Time is of great value to us. Sit.”

Some of the group moved, but Chandra didn’t cross the threshold. “You betrayed us to the Consulate. Why should we listen to a thing you have to say?”

“Aether above, my friend! Thank you. It’s so rare that I get to correct a human for shortsightedness. I pushed you to act. I took cautious and meticulous planning off the table. What remained was decisiveness. And here you are. Prepared to act decisively. Won’t you please sit?” Gonti gestured to an open chair; Pia was already sitting down next to it.

“Let me see if I understand,” continued Gonti, tenting their fingers. “You have no tools. You have no ships. You have no aether. Everything that could serve as a potential weapon against the Consulate has been seized.”

Gonti gestured behind them, and a guard opened a wide door, revealing a glittering storeroom. “Fortunately, I have some small experience at keeping the hands of the Consulate away from my valuables.”



Art by Darek Zabrocki

Gonti stood and bowed graciously. “As Ghirapur’s single largest collector of the exceptional, I believe I have what you’ll need for your little insurrection.” They nodded to Pia. “I offer it in the spirit of... public service.”

“Don’t be cute,” Chandra said. “What’s your price?”

Gonti’s eyes glittered like stars in winter. “I expect that will depend on how useful we prove to one another. Would you not agree?”



Art by Chris Rahn

Sram chewed pensively on a tiny set of fine-detail pliers as he looked out the slanted windows of the Aether Hub’s control room. The gantries and catwalks beneath him were lit by the glowing lines of aether tubes criss-crossing the facility. An elf had once described the Aether Hub to him as Ghirapur’s beating heart. Melodramatic, but accurate enough as a metaphor.

As he watched, one of the glowing blue tubes flickered and dimmed.

“Pressure drain in junction twelve,” said one of Sram’s edificers.

The engineer’s tone was calm, but the control room was abuzz with nervous activity. That was the fourth junction that had “malfunctioned” this evening and the second that Sram had witnessed personally.

“Reroute to thirteen and nine,” said Sram. “No repair order just yet.”

The maintenance teams sent to fix the first two malfunctions had found nothing out of the ordinary, and a Consulate escort had knocked on Sram’s door an hour ago to tell him that the Hub was suffering some kind of problem and they needed him—the Hub’s chief architect—to figure it out. So here he was, chewing on his pliers, hunting for signs of breakdown or sabotage, instead of drinking a mug of warm turmeric milk and getting ready for bed.

Allocation was supposed to be *boring* . The operators of the Hub directed the city’s aether supply where it was needed. Consulate facilities had priority, then the various neighborhoods according to their need. Ideally, aether was distributed equitably and everyone was happy. When construction of the Inventors’ Fairgrounds had begun, the portions allotted to “under-utilized neighborhoods” were reduced per Consulate decree, and the muttering—Sram’s and the citizens’—had begun. But it was just an emergency measure, he assured himself. Just temporary, surely.

Since the crackdown, “emergency” allocation had become standard practice. Worse—it had become *political* . Neighborhoods received aether, or didn’t, at central Consulate direction, and all of them

were getting less than normal. Instead, the edificers at the Hub had been ordered to increase supply to Consulate facilities.

“Senior Edificer,” said his assistant Rajni, behind him.

“Hhrm?” he said.

“Consul Kambal is here to see you,” said Rajni.

They hadn’t hauled a Consul out of bed to deal with malfunctions. This was something else.

Sram stopped chewing, considered, and left the pliers in his mouth as he turned.

There was Kambal—*Consul* Kambal—with his shrewd eyes and his hovering attendants. Thick scents of camphor and sandalwood attar flooded the room; the man must have soaked his coat in it. The Consul, on the short side for a human, still loomed over Sram, and took evident pleasure in doing so.



Kambal, Consul of Allocation | Art by Vincent Proce

“Comful,” said Sram, around the pliers.

Kambal’s mustache twitched gratifyingly.

Sram’s superiors had always said that chewing on things while he thought was his worst habit: unprofessional, unhygienic, and boorish, showing disrespect for both his station and his tools. Now Sram was senior edificer, and most of those former superiors were either happily retired or still tinkering away in mid-level technical jobs. Several of them now reported to him.

Kambal, the Consul of Allocation, was the only one of those superiors who still gave Sram orders. Sram’s distaste for the man was matched only by Kambal’s obvious disdain for Sram.

“Senior Edificer,” said Kambal. “I wasn’t expecting to find you working the night shift.”

Sram took the pliers out of his mouth.

“Malfunctions,” he said. “I wouldn’t expect the Consul of Allocation to come all the way out here to talk with the night shift supervisor, if you’ll pardon me for saying so.”

“It’s an urgent matter,” said Kambal. “Just as well you’re here to discuss it.”

He gestured to the interior wall of the control room, where an aether-flow diagram showed supply to various parts of the city. The neighborhoods of Ghirapur were dim or dark. Consulate facilities glowed.

“Earlier today,” said Kambal, “this facility received a supply requisition from the Spire. It was ignored.”

“I didn’t ignore it,” said Sram. “I read it very carefully and concluded that it had to be an error. I returned a query. As soon as I get the correct order, I can—”

“There was no error, Senior Edificer,” said Kambal. “The Grand Consul signed the order himself.”

Sram couldn’t keep himself from snorting.

“With respect, Consul, did you actually read the request? It was for a constant flow, indefinitely, at a rate that would drain the city’s reservoirs in under a week. It was a mistake.”

“No, Senior Edificer. It was an order.”

In Sram’s experience, the two were hardly mutually exclusive.

“Consul,” he said. “We’d have to cut the flow to most of the city. Even other official facilities. I don’t have the authority—”

“I defer to your expertise in making the necessary adjustments,” said Kambal. “Authorization granted.”

So the slimy bastard had come down here to bully one of Sram’s subordinates into obeying an outrageous order.

“Kambal, *no*. I can’t do this. It’s dereliction.”

“You have your orders, Senior Edificer,” said Kambal. “Carry them out, or someone else will.”

“In writing,” said Sram. “I want this in writing. With your signature.”

Kambal glared at him for an interminable moment, silent, his mustache twitching.

The control room shook.

“What—”

“Explosion at junction nine!” said an edificer.

“Damn!” said Sram. He turned back to the window. A dazzling spray of blue lit up the night, then dissipated. “Report!”

The edificers chattered technical details at him about pressure spikes, routing plans, and the extent of the damage.

“Sram, what is happening?” demanded Kambal.

“You’re leaving,” said Sram. “Now.”

Kambal’s eyes went wide.

“We’ll discuss the supply issue later,” he said. “In the meantime, defend this facility.”

Obviously.

The Consul whirled and vanished up the stairs with his attendants—no doubt to an airship on the roof. Good.

The room shook again, and this time the blue flash of the explosion lit the whole room. That one was closer. Twenty-three?

“Explosion at twenty-three!”

Still got it, thought Sram.

The control room was louder now. Alarms sounded. Edifiers dispatched repair teams and coordinated flow reroutes. Security teams reported multiple incursions.

Sram stuck the pliers back in his mouth and listened. He tried to see the shape of the attack. Nine and twenty-three. Not vital. Certainly not irreparable, even given the size of the blasts. The renegades were off to a bad start if they were trying to disrupt the Hub’s operations.

If.

Nine and twenty-three were lousy choices to sabotage the Hub. That made them great places to blow holes in the walls without damaging anything vital.

“Shut it down,” he said, around the pliers. “Full lockdown.”

“Full lockdown,” came the acknowledgment.

Maybe this was a siphon raid, and the explosions were meant to draw off the facility’s guards while siphoners made off with as much aether as they could drain. If so, they’d underestimated how easily the edifiers could cut off most of the facility.

Sram turned to Kailash, a fellow dwarf who commanded the security forces that guarded the building. He took the pliers out of his mouth.

“Commander, those explosions may have breached our defenses.”

“Understood,” she said.

One of the edifiers, a vedalken with close-cropped hair, turned away from her station.

“Lockdown’s not responding,” she said. “The feeds are still open.”

“Is that even possible?” asked another edifier, a young human man barely out of training.

Sram closed his eyes and saw the Hub’s blueprints. Sometimes he dreamed of them.

“Yes,” he said. “If someone jammed them open.”

“How? Aren’t the shutoffs *inside* the pipes?” asked the young man. The kids fresh off training knew the blueprints almost as well as Sram did. But they didn’t know the job.

“How long can an aetherborn hold their breath?” asked Sram.

“They don’t brea—”

“Exactly,” said Sram. Once, years ago, he’d caught an aetherborn *living* in the aether pipes. He had to admire their tenacity. “Kill the pumps. Now!”

That was a more drastic measure. It would take hours to start them back up. But drastic measures now seemed justified.

Edifiers barked acknowledgments. The subtle, omnipresent vibration of the pumps faded away. But there were other sounds, metallic squeals and low-frequency pulses. Fighting?

“Commander, what’s our security status?”

“They’re inside,” said Kailash. “Can’t tell you much more than that. They’ve got something out there snatching our relay thopters out of the sky. We’re relying on runners.”

His people and Kailash’s gave a steady stream of reports, talking over each other and the sounds of battle.

“They’ve got some kind of pulse weapon—”

“Shutdown confirmed, rerouting—”

“—our own automatons turning against us—”

“Security doors aren’t responding!”

“—gear we’ve never seen before.”

“—didn’t look like she had a flamethrower, but there was fire—”

“—crawling out of the pipes—”

“Maulfists! Brace the doors!”

Sram stared out the window. He could make out activity on the southern platform, some kind of mechanism being set up. There was a flash, and a muffled *thump*, *thump* —

He ducked just as two grappling claws the size of ballista bolts smashed through the control room window in a spray of glass. His edifiers took cover.

The claw’s cable pulled it back, and three articulated digits dug into the wall. There was a quick, high-pitched whine as it bolted itself on. A few feet away, the second claw did the same.

Sram grabbed the claw next to him, pliers at the ready to try to disassemble the thing. It delivered a stinging shock, enough to numb his fingers and dissuade him from further tampering.

There was a loud whirring sound. Sram risked a peek out the window.

Looming out of the darkness, a little gondola zipped toward him, suspended between the two cables. In it were a dozen renegades brandishing weapons and tools Sram couldn’t even identify.

The control room’s security doors gave way to the maulfist attack, and more renegades poured through, backed up by suborned Consulate security automatons. Kailash and her troops went down fighting.

The gondola slammed into the wall of the control room, and the renegades poured in. Soon there were at least two weapons trained on every member of Sram’s edifier crew, and three on him. Many of the renegades knew him. Knew that he was the one who’d cut off the aether flow to their neighborhoods during the current crisis. He did not begrudge them their anger.

One of the renegades from the gondola stepped forward and removed her goggles—an older woman with an air of authority. Sram recognized her from the arena.

He stood up straight.



Pia Nalaar | Art by Tyler Jacobson

“Pia Nalaar,” he said. “So you’re in charge of all this?”

She laughed at him, though not maliciously.

“Nobody’s in charge,” she said. “But you have something that’s ours. We’re here to take it back.”

He surveyed the wrecked control room, packed with renegades.

“Nalaar,” he said, more quietly. “My people aren’t soldiers. And I’m worried some of yours may resent us for...recent allocations.”

“They do,” she said. “You’ll be treated well. You have my word.”

“Then I yield,” said Sram. “The Aether Hub is yours.”

For now .

What was a reasonable amount of time to wrest control of an Aether Hub from Consulate forces? Rashmi wasn’t sure, but the renegade strike team had been gone for hours; it seemed they should return to the warehouse at any moment, victorious or not. Either way, that left little time for Rashmi and Mitul to complete the skyship.

Lighting in the cavernous warehouse was dim, in part to conserve aether—the renegades would soon run out unless they could secure the Hub—and in part to avoid drawing the attention of Consulate sky patrols.

In the middle of the vast, shadowy space sat the massive skyship, nearly as immense as the warehouse itself: the *Tezzeret’s Ruin* .



Art by Christine Choi

The skyship was the next step in the renegade’s plan: secure the Hub, use the aether to power the ship, and fly *Tezzeret’s Ruin* in an attack on the Consulate’s Spire. The renegades were going to bring that monstrous man down, and they would destroy the Planar Bridge along with him.

The Planar Bridge, that’s what *they* —the Planeswalkers, as Saheeli had introduced them to Rashmi —were calling Rashmi’s matter transporter. They used the term like a curse word; whenever it was uttered, a ripple of anxiety spread through the room. They whispered to each other about the atrocities and havoc Tezzeret could wreak with Rashmi’s invention in his possession. Each scenario was more dire than the last.

That’s why she was here. If the skyship she helped build for them led to the destruction of the Planar Bridge, she would no longer be responsible for the threat her creation might pose to all the worlds she had seen out there.

And then she would be done. She would put away her tools and stop inventing. This was the last thing she would make that would be used for harm.

In the soft glow of the lamp that Mitul held over the skyship’s engine hatch, Rashmi twisted her wrench to secure the condenser mount. Each rotation twisted the feeling of finality further into her gut. Three more bolts.

“...If you are not interested in pursuing that line of aetherlogical research, I have also been working on another proposal. This one is more theory based.” Mitul’s voice prodded its way into Rashmi’s consciousness. He had been talking this whole time, going on about the next line of research he hoped they would pursue together. The Planeswalkers had made Rashmi and Mitul promise that they would abandon their matter transport research. Ever since he had heard, Mitul had thrown himself into finding a new project. “The notion of the progression of aether through time is vastly unexplored. I believe we could make great strides in that field. Don’t you agree?”

“Perhaps we could,” Rashmi muttered noncommittally. She looked up into her friend’s earnest eyes. Leaving him would be the hardest part of all of this. But if she wanted to find a new path, one that didn’t lead to hurt and destruction, she had no choice but to leave. “Do you have a nice set of wrenches, Mitul?”

“What size do you need?” He turned to the nearby workbench, as always, ready to help. “An angled grip perhaps?”

“No, not for me. I mean, do you have your own set?”

“Oh.” Mitul cocked his head, confused. “I use yours.” He cleared his throat. “I hope that is all right.”

“Of course it is,” Rashmi said quickly. “You should keep using them.” She would give him her wrenches. She’d give him all her tools. There were no other hands she would rather imagine wielding them once she was gone.

One more bolt.

Rashmi reached for the far corner of the mount, but her hand began to shake. She tried to steady herself, now was not the time. But it wasn’t her hand that was trembling; there was a quaking coming from the floor beneath her feet. It intensified until it felt like a migrating flock of giants was about to burst through the side of the warehouse. The renegades. They were back.

“The Hub is ours!” The cry rang through the rafters. With a deep groan, the immense doors were rolled open.

“They have done it.” Mitul’s eyes widened with reverence. He’d taken to the renegade movement with passion and resolve that Rashmi admired. Rashmi nodded and forced a smile.

“Renegades!” Pia Nalaar’s voice sounded from the other side of the skyship. “Renegades, gather round.”

Mitul looked to Rashmi, entreating. “Go,” she said. “I’ll finish up here and I’ll be right behind you.”

Mitul hesitated.

“We’ve won the day!” Pia cried to more cheers.

Rashmi could see the spark in Mitul’s eyes. He wanted to be out there. “Go,” she encouraged. This would be easier than saying goodbye anyway. She would slip out before they could call her up to the front. Saheeli had asked her to be part of the dedication ceremony, but that was the last thing Rashmi wanted. It was time for her to go.

“I will save you a place.” Mitul smiled and hurried around the tail of the skyship. Rashmi lifted her hand to silently wave goodbye.

Across the warehouse, Pia continued, “Today, we faced those who would oppress us, and we showed them that we are stronger than they are.” A roar of triumph. “But our fight isn’t over. It has only just begun. What we have gained at the Hub will help us with what we have to do next.”

“Bring down Tezzeret!” Someone cried. More voices echoed the sentiment as, with one last turn of the wrench Rashmi finished her work. It felt very final.

“Tezzeret doesn’t belong here,” Pia was saying to the renegades. “He’s a liar and a cheat who manipulated his way into power. He’s a tyrant who cannot be allowed to rule. It’s up to us to take him down!”

The response was deafening.

“And you will,” Rashmi whispered. She secured the engine hatch; *Tezzeret’s Ruin* was complete.

She used the corner of her skirts to wipe the oil and dust off the golden filigree. “Good luck.” With a final squeeze she turned to go, but she stopped short; something on the hatch caught her eye. She paused, leaning in closer, squinting to make it out. There was an engraving in the metal, visible now only after she had cleaned away the layer of grime. Two letters, carefully carved by an artistic hand: K.N.

Rashmi’s breath hitched. Kiran Nalaar. It had to be. Pia’s late partner, and the inventor who had designed this ship so long ago. Rashmi ran her fingers over the engraving, gently cleaning away the rest of the oil and dirt, as though her tenderness could make up for the fate of his creation. *I’m sorry for what has become of this*. She pressed her fingers into the letters. *I know what it’s like to see something you’ve made used to cause harm*.

A wave of aetheric energy welled up from the filigree, and a bright blue swirling glow consumed Rashmi’s vision. Her heart leapt. She knew this feeling. It was the most wonderful feeling. She had felt it only once before, when examining Avaati Vya’s prototype aether refiner at the Museum of Invention. The display had said “Don’t touch,” but Rashmi couldn’t help herself. She had run her hands over the metalwork, and the next thing she knew she was awash in the spirit of the inventor inside.

Projects of the heart were like this; inventors who poured their souls into their work left a little bit of themselves in their creations. Kiran’s were the hands that had first shaped this metal, his was the mind that had conceived of this design, and now his essence was flowing out through what he had made.

Rashmi was inundated by his spirit. His love of flying. Soaring high above the city. Nothing to limit him. His passion for creating, for making something that had never been made before. His eagerness to push boundaries and take risks. And then something more, something she wasn’t expecting. Kiran had a fervent desire to defend the freedom to create. To stand up to those who tried to limit innovation. To protect the spirit of invention he held so dear.

It was as though she had stopped breathing, as though her heart had stopped beating, and now as feeling rushed back through her, Rashmi staggered away from the skyship. Afterimages of swirling blue danced behind her eyes, sending her off balance. A pair of arms caught her. “They’re calling for you.” It was Mitul. “They want you up on the platform.”

Rashmi tried to find her voice to protest, but her senses were still swimming and her mind reeling. Mitul guided her around the bow of the ship and urged her to walk up the steps to the platform.

Pia extended her hand in welcome. “And here she is, the lead aether-engineer, Rashmi, to dedicate our skyship.” As a round of cheers rang out, Pia put her arm around Rashmi’s shoulder. “Rashmi has been through more than most of us can imagine,” Pia said. “She was held captive by Tezzeret himself, and she fought her way out.” That elicited cries of support. “I’d say she’s earned the right to dedicate this ship to his ruin.” Pia handed Rashmi a glass bottle of glowing aether. “Do us the honor. Let’s end that monster!”

Cries of “End him!” and “Down with the tyrant!” and “*Tezzeret’s Ruin!*” drew Rashmi’s eyes out to the crowd. There were so many people, a sea of faces, and they were all looking at her. Rashmi stared back out at them, the renegades. But in that moment, that’s not what she saw. She saw inventors. Every single one of them was here because they believed in the spirit of invention. The same spirit she had felt through Kiran. It still pulsed within her, passionate and bright.

There was more to this skyship, more to this revolution, than she had allowed herself to see. She’d let her fear win. She’d convinced herself that all of this was only about destruction. She couldn’t have been more wrong.

“Go on,” Pia prompted.

Rashmi inched forward, clutching the bottle of aether more tightly so it wouldn’t slip from her sweating fingers. “Hello.” Her voice cracked, sounding small in the cold, dry vastness. She tried again, louder. “Hi.” No one responded. She cleared her throat. “I’m going to dedicate this ship, like Pia asked. But I think it needs a new name first.”

People shifted uncomfortably, murmuring to each other. Pia caught Rashmi’s eye, smiling too wide, entreating her with her eyes to do the thing she was supposed to do.

This *was* the thing she was supposed to do.

“*Tezzeret’s Ruin*,” Rashmi said. “It has a nice ring to it. For me especially. Trust me.” There were a few dry chuckles. “And it is accurate. It’s what we have to do, end that monster’s reign. And we’ll do it. We will.”

There was a stray shout.

“But in the end, that’s not why any of us are here, not fully anyway. We’re not here to fight, to bring down, or to destroy. We will do that because we must. Because it is necessary if we want to protect. But protecting is what we truly want to do. We’re here to save our city. To defend its spirit—the spirit of invention. That’s what’s at stake. We’re inventors. We create. We build. We add to this world; we don’t take away.”

Scattered cries of agreement, echoed Rashmi’s words.

“Deep down we all know who we are. But if you need reminding, think of the man who designed this ship: the great inventor Kiran Nalaar.” All at once every eye in the room turned to the woman standing next to Rashmi. Rashmi felt Pia straighten at her side. “No one embodied the spirit of invention more than Kiran. He lived to create. And he believed in the right to the freedom of expression for all. He built this ship not to destroy, but to discover. And it is my greatest hope that when this is over, when we have taken down the monster, when we have won the day, that Kiran’s ship will fly for hope. That it will carry his spirit, our spirit of invention to every corner of the world. So I dedicate this skyship the *Heart of Kiran*,” Rashmi raised the bottle of aether over her head. “May we never forget who we are.” She broke the bottle on the bow of the skyship, and the mystical blue substance blossomed across the gleaming golden metal.

Cheers boomed, and tears pressed against the corners of Rashmi’s eyes. Pia took her by the shoulders. “Thank you. Thank you so very much.” She clasped Rashmi’s hand and raised it to uproarious applause.

“For the spirit of invention!” a voice called from the crowd. Rashmi recognized the voice; she found Mitul, his fist raised in the air. Their eyes met, and she smiled at her friend, knowing that she wouldn’t have to say goodbye. They were inventors, researchers in the burgeoning field of temporal aether abstraction, and they wouldn’t let Tezzeret take that away from them.