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# The Weft Hunter

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From set *Edge of Eternities*  
03. 07. 2025

Cail Station was silent, in the way of long-abandoned places.

The silence of the void had a different, more vibrant texture: a waiting, wanting thing. The moment Ghan's seam-ripper parted space, cutting a radiant blue line from the void into the station's dark, debris-strewn arcade, he felt the change. He stepped through quickly, hurrying through the last words of the weftwalking ritual that had carried him between worlds as he closed the cut behind him. He'd never been to Cail, but he'd seen dozens of stations exactly like it—down to the layout of the empty arcade and the oval windows looking out over a nameless quasar.

His footsteps echoed as he edged past the detritus that littered the floor: broken luggage, scattered boxes. Bones. Clearly, scavengers had visited in the twenty years since this station's evacuation, but the wrongness that pervaded the musty, unstirred air had nothing to do with petty theft. Ancient instincts, relics of the days when the Drix first made their way out into the lamellae and discovered a universe at war, screamed at Ghan to flee. Unlike many of the peoples that populated the worlds between the Walls, the Drix remembered the Eldrazi and the war that had brought all of reality to the brink of destruction.

And Ghan had more reason than most Drix to loathe the Eldrazi.

He shoved spite and instinct aside. A weft hunter was here for a reason, and it wasn't to flee at the first whiff of chaos. The instinct for flight had outlived its original use, but he repurposed it and let it guide his steps deeper into the station.

Below the arcade, in a dilapidated docking bay, a fresh hole yawned in the station's wall: sharp edges, still faintly warm from whatever energy had ripped through. Any eye could tell that this damage wasn't from twenty years ago, but Ghan also made out a second wound overlaid on the first: not in the infrastructure of the station, but in the Weft itself. It had scabbed over but not properly healed. *No seam-ripper opened a wound like that—but what, then?* It stank of Eldrazi corruption, and while Ghan could conjure educated guesses as to how such a thing had come to be, every hypothesis was equally useless if he lacked an answer to that most important question: *what now?* The wound itself was the source of his unease; whatever had made it was long gone.

Sorothir would've known what to do.

That thought reinvoked the urge for flight—a personal instinct, not one engraved in a species over centuries of fighting. Ghan raised the communicator on his wrist to his mouth and ignored its infuriatingly cheerful chirp as he activated it, threading a signal through the Edge. "Jadnis. It's me."

He waited for his words to wend their way through the void. Jadnis was a consultant, on assignment to the Pinnacle archives on Pellerife—as different a life to Ghan's as someone could live and still be Drix.

"Ghan? It's been *weeks*." Jadnis's words tumbled together, one blurring into the next. "Are you ... It seems stupid to ask if you're 'all right,' so I won't."

"I need a favor." It often came in handy to know a Pinnacle archivist, and he didn't mind taking advantage of that fact. "I'm at Cail Station, looking at—I don't know what I'm looking at. A breach in the Weft, not caused by a seam-ripper. Can you search the station's records? Anything about research into new methods of interstellar transit, or ..."

"Sounds like a big 'or.' But I'll check it out." Before Ghan could thank her, or ask her for a time estimate, she added: "In the meantime, you should head to Andenstalay. The damage you're describing, something similar happened there two days ago. Two people died; no local leads on the causative agent."

"On my way," Ghan promised and broke the thread. No need to hope for an interstellar transport to pass through the system; walking the Weft was a Drix's birthright. He lifted his seam-ripper and hummed a single note that resonated with the vibrations of its electric-blue blade. At a touch, the Weft parted to let him step through into a higher lamella, out across the superstructure of reality.

The last time Ghan had come to Andenstalay, it was only a waypoint on a long hunt that led him and Sorothir through all the worst and weariest corners between the Walls. What he saw when he cut his way into a stinking back alley matched his memories: a maze of tram tracks and monorails, skyscrapers whose heights vanished into gray-pink smog.

Unlike before, his quarry was close; that same sense of wrongness had preceded him here. Stronger, more present than on Cail Station. He shifted his grip on his seam-ripper so that it felt more like a weapon than a tool and left the alley.

Down crowded streets, through public buildings with winding queues, Ghan navigated with his own pulsating discomfort as a guide. Another thing hadn't changed in the last ten years: people got out of the way of a Drix hunter with purpose in his stride. Ghan kept a wary eye out, too. If Pinnacle enforcement agents spotted him, they might interfere with his hunt of a local civilian. Or worse—they might try to *help* him.



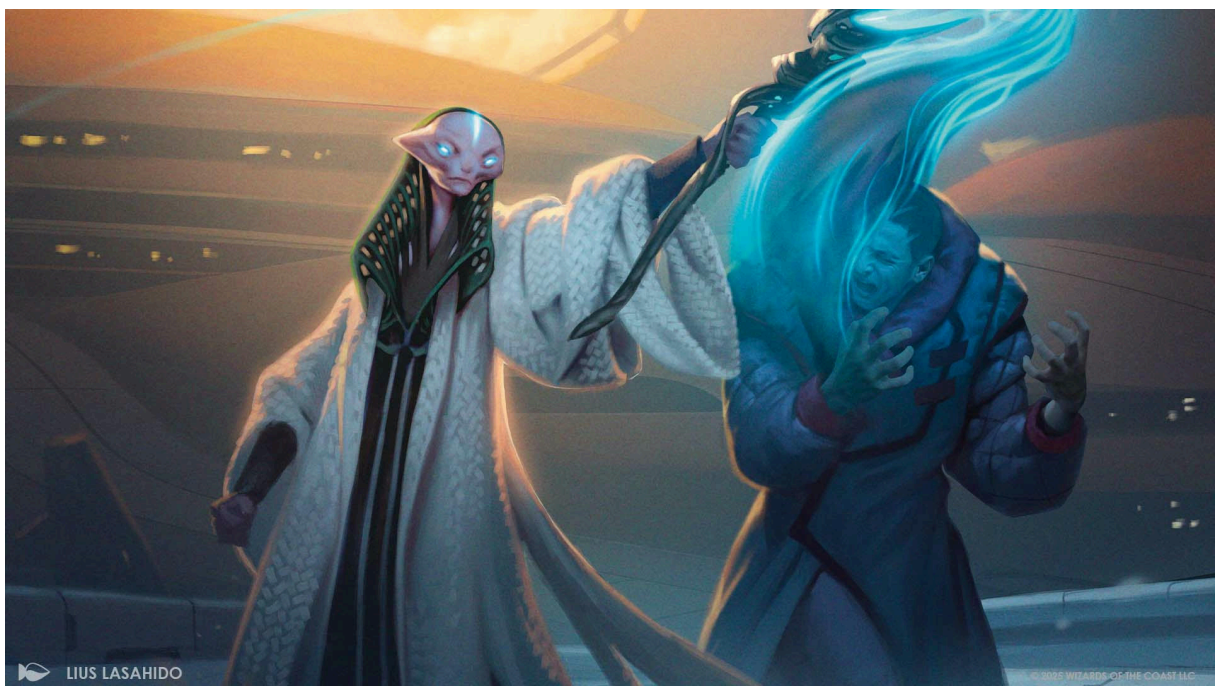
Art by: Victor Adame Minguez

He pulled up short outside a fenced-in square, stacked with house-size shipping containers. A squat structure in the middle anchored a taut cable as thick as Ghan was tall, which ran up into the clouds and disappeared. *A space elevator?* Something inside it called out to Ghan, and duty demanded that he answer.

The seam-ripper parted chain links as easily as it did reality. Ghan ran his fingers over the cold metal of shipping container after shipping container. Nothing chaos-touched slept within. *Where then?*

“Tell me what to do,” he said to a shipping container and kicked it for good measure.

“Excuse me!” If the tainted presence hadn’t already shredded his nerves, the voice wouldn’t have startled him. He spun to find a human woman in a khaki-green uniform—yellow-gray hair, probably middle-aged. Her badge read “Kesori Umberlin.” Her sleeve insignia proclaimed her as a third-degree elevator-loading technician. “Authorized personnel only.”



Art by: Lius Lasahido

And the surge of nausea that struck Ghan meant *she* was the source of the contamination.

He pointed his seam-ripper—and hesitated. A wefthunter’s ruthlessness was another weapon in his arsenal. But he’d destroyed enough protobeings before to see that this woman, her clear eyes and her workaday weariness, didn’t fit the profile.

“I just want to talk.” He would kill her afterward, if he had to. But if he *didn’t* have to ...

Like her fellow citizens, Kesori didn’t miss the significance of the seam-ripper. She stepped back, one hand darting to her pocket. “No,” she said, and bolted.

Ghan launched himself after her, cursing the moment he’d wasted. She knew the layout of this place: the crooks and corners, entrances and exits. If he lost her, she’d have a chance to use whatever horrific curio she had in her possession. He whistled, short and sharp—a sound that insinuated itself between the oscillating buzz of his seam-ripper rather than resonating with it—and sliced himself a path.

A split second later, he dropped out of a shining slit in the air, a scant few meters in front of Kesori. She yelped and swerved left—Ghan followed, already cutting. Sorothir had hated it when he microstepped like this. *Risky, reckless. One day you'll mistime it, and I'll lose you.*

Ghan slipped back into the Andenstalayan lamella and dodged the swinging hook of a loading crane. Kesori was already scrambling over the fence. He cursed fluently and stepped again.

It would've been easier with two. One to fence her in, one to pin her down. But one was what he had. He flung himself between lamellae, weaving his path around hers: through the indoor passages that crisscrossed the city, over tram tracks, across a marketplace where the reek of fresh fish cut through the smog. In the jumbled, crowd-choked platforms of the monorail exchange, he thought he'd lost her—but no, there she was ducking into a train on the highest level. He aimed himself at her and sliced clean and true.

And short.

The momentum he'd built before the cut gave him a split second to tread empty air. Enough to realize what was about to happen before gravity took over. Like jerking awake at night in an empty bed—the panic, the certainty of the fall. His arms flailed. He saw Kesori's wide-eyed face, right in front of him, and wondered who would hunt her once he was dead—

And then he was swinging, not falling. A tearing sensation in his shoulder—a breath-breaking impact against the side of the monorail platform—he scrabbled desperately with both feet and found himself lifted by the grace of strength other than his own. When he landed on his knees, it was Kesori's face in front of his again: no longer open-mouthed with shock, her lips flat and white. “Why didn't you kill me?” she asked.

“Killing ordinary people isn't my job,” he croaked, when enough air had squeezed back into his lungs. “Just give me the artifact.”

Her lips pulled back, baring her teeth. “No. Not when I'm this close to Errit.”

She produced the artifact from her pocket; blood-brown and gnarled, aglow from inside. Pain slowed Ghan when he grabbed at it; Kesori stumbled back and spoke a word into its twisted orifice. A strange singularity churned out of artifact and wrapped itself around her. Reality bellowed in response, a register only a Drix could hear, its own pain so much greater than Ghan's own.

“Get down!” he shouted, not waiting to see whether people listened. He threw his arms over his own head as Kesori's artifact tore open a passageway to pitch her out between lamellae, through space and—

The rebound snapped the monorail sideways. The tracks screamed but held the train's weight; passengers wailed and shoved, fighting for the uncertain safety of the stairs leading down. Ghan knew some had fallen and couldn't make himself look down. He stood, letting the survivors stream past him, to study the ragged edges of this new wound in the Weft. Bad enough she'd gotten away; worse still, she'd hurt people on her way out. Unbearable, to know what she'd taken with her.

Only the Drix had ever been able to walk the Weft without the aid of an eternity drive. But this artifact had stolen and corrupted those ancient secrets. And now Kesori Umberlin was the one being in the universe who held a way to pierce through space *and* time.

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When Ghan tumbled out into Jadnis's office on Pellerife, he landed so hard that it knocked the last few notes of the weftwalking rite out of his lungs. Jadnis rolled her eyes. She sang the notes he'd missed

even as she swiped her stylus to enter a final line of documentation on the crystalline facets of her workstation. Even an archivist knew the rites, even if she didn't often have reason to perform them.

"Just like old times," she grouched, standing up to inspect him. "Every time I planned a lunch date, you and Sorothir would drop in on me demanding to be patched up."

"I don't need patching up." Ghan brushed off her attempts to poke at his injured shoulder. It wasn't his dominant arm; he could still manage to use his seam-ripper. "I need information."

Jadnis agreed, but only conditionally: archive access, in exchange for him drinking a pot of the garnet-leaf tea her mother swore by as a remedy for all physical ills. "I don't know if it'll put your shoulder back in its socket," she said as she installed him at her workstation with a steaming cup at his elbow. Her stylus danced over the workstation's facets, entering a series of access codes. "But if you happen to have a case of scale fungus or infectious cloacitis, it should fix you up."

He looked up long enough to call after her: "My shoulder isn't *out of its socket*." But she'd gone, and the Pinnacle's archives weren't going to search themselves. This "Errit" that Kesori had mentioned ... If he could find that, he might find her, too. He lifted the stylus and drew a name on the closest facet of Jadnis's workstation.

His first queries returned too many results to be useful. Across the Pinnacle, there were hundreds of places and millions of beings named Errit. Adding in Kesori and Umberlin and even Andenstalay didn't meaningfully shrink the mountains of data.

*ADD KEY: Cail Station*

This time, only a dozen-odd results tumbled out. Birth certificates. Immigration passes. Education. Work permits. Refugee-status documentation.

A death record.

Ghan read everything, including the lone piece of news coverage attached to the whole affair. When Jadnis returned, complaining that her lunch date had ordered hand-squids as a main course—didn't he know that hand-squids were practically an intelligent species? She couldn't see anyone seriously who didn't know that—he shoved back in her chair so hard he upset the untouched cup of tea.

"I recognize that look." Jadnis took a seat opposite him, frivolity immediately forgotten. "Tell me."

"That station ..." he began. Anger choked him; he spun the workstation, turning the active facets toward her and letting them speak on his behalf. Jadnis produced a second stylus from her sleeve and scanned through the story: the botched evacuation of Cail Station that had prioritized the retrieval of expensive, specialized mining equipment over the lives of its residents. Humans, Eumidians; adults and children alike.

Not all evil in the lamellae originated from an ancient war with beings beyond the Chaos Wall. Across history, people had charted their own banal course into the darkness, for their own mundane desires.

When she finished, Jadnis's eyes flicked to him. "Errit was her sister?"

"After I destroy this artifact," Ghan said tightly, "I'm going to track down Oscillus Cail and the rest, and I'm going to ..."

Going to what? Could he destroy an eviler-than-usual-but-ordinary human the same way he would destroy a protobeing? There was no justice in the universe except that shaped by hands like his.

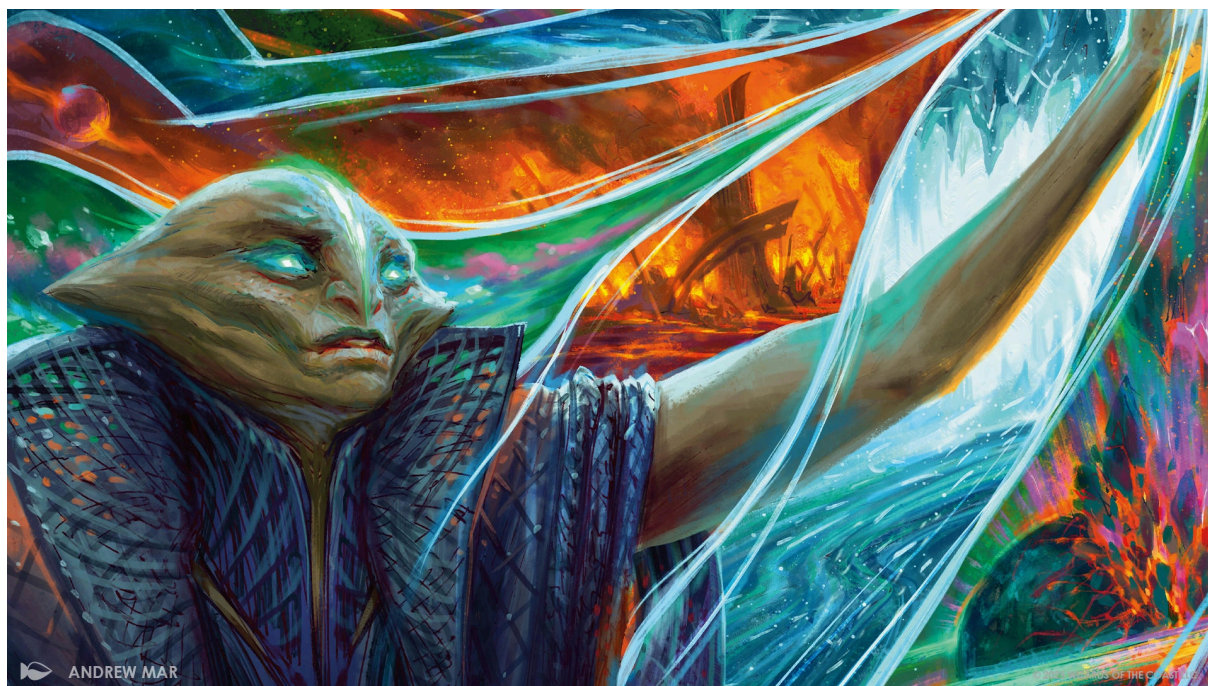
Jadnis cut through his silence as deftly as if she'd wielded a seam-ripper of her own. "No. You aren't." He opened his mouth to object, and she threw her stylus at his face. "No, Ghan. *Your* job is dealing



with Eldrazi. And *mine* is dealing with everybody else. You don't have to do everything alone. Even now." She paused, light from the workstation reflected in her black eyes. "I know it's not the same as it is for you, Ghan. But he was my friend."

"... I know." Her friend, and his partner, in hunting and all else. "I know that. I'm sorry."

"Well." Jadnis reached out expectantly. Ghan unhooked her stylus from where it had landed in his cowl and set it on her waiting palm. "We have that in common, too."



Art by: Andrew Mar

Threads of gold and luminous blue stitched together the stretch of lamella that led Ghan away from Pellerife. Beautiful, if you liked that sort of thing. And Ghan did, when he remembered to look. Every time he'd weftwalked lately, he'd rushed from one lamella to the next, tripping through the ritual to the beat of his own double-time footsteps. Of course, the hunt always drove him, but he had other reasons to hurry. Here in the Weft, he felt—or pretended?—that Sorothir's love lingered, in a way it couldn't in the quotidian worlds they'd always moved so lightly over. Unmoored from its origins in time and space. Never gone. The Weft was where he missed Sorothir the most.

But as hours scrolled past in the void, he found a fresh pain to add to that lasting one. Slowly, the hunting-ache in his bones and the biographical details he'd gleaned from Kesori's files drew themselves into alignment and pointed him toward the world called Ssata.

As he wound his way through the enfolding lamellar pleats, he refined his approach. He'd rather avoid startling her into another chase. Yes, his shoulder was in its socket, but it was not resting particularly comfortably there. Measure twice, cut once. With his best judgment, he angled his seam-ripper and sliced through into an ugly, unfurnished one-room apartment. Kesori stood at the entryway: one hand on the knob, one foot inside. Her eyes widened, and he drew himself up—ready to chase, if needed, but at least to look as if he were up to the task. But she didn't bolt; only leaned against the jamb. She looked different. Not older, but perhaps ... lessened? Her use of the artifact had taken something from her she couldn't replenish.

"Is this before the monorail for you?" she asked wearily. "Or after? You'd think I could keep track; I've only ever managed to jump a few weeks."

"After." He shuffled sideways—not toward her—and made sure to leave a long stretch of stained tiles between them. He wondered how this place had looked when a family had lived here; whether Kesori saw it differently than he did. Mostly what she saw was his seam-ripper: her eyes carefully tracked its blue arc. His earlier hesitation had pierced his resolve. Now, he found pity wedged itself into the gap left behind. "How did you get your hands on that thing?"

"No one ever notices the elevator attendants who handle their luggage. We're basically part of the machinery." Her hand twitched as if she wanted the reassurance of reaching for her pocket. Instead, she slipped inside and closed the door. Whatever she intended, it wasn't escape. "It ... called me. As if it knew I needed it."

More like it knew it needed *her*; or rather that its architects had built in such a contingency in case they lost control of it. Any unwitting patsy, anyone wounded and wanting enough to answer temptation. Anyone who would use the artifact without understanding its real purpose.

"People died because of what you did on Andenstalay," he said. She winced, and he pressed harder. Words could cut, too. "Even more have been hurt. I think you know you can't safely use that thing. I don't believe any human could."

Her face tensed. "But *you* could, Drix?"

"... Yes."

"It chose *me*. Not you." Deliberately she withdrew it from her uniform pocket. Its appearance hadn't changed, but the sight of it wrenched Ghan's stomach even more viciously. Whatever life or vitality it had drawn from Kesori, it had taken into itself and poisoned. "You want Errit to stay dead, but she deserves better. From the world. From me!" She swept her arm, gesturing to the dingy, unoccupied apartment. "*This* is where she was. Where she is. I took her away—but I can bring her back here. It'll work this time." Her eyes darted to the artifact, and she lifted it to her mouth.

"Kesori, don't—"

"It's okay," she said. Then she laughed as if earnestly believing that it was. "I know what to do."

With a whistle, Ghan spun his seam-ripper. A single micro-step, the smallest he'd ever taken, three meters across the apartment and he could try to wrestle the artifact out of her hands—

The micro-step saved his life. When he popped back into the apartment a split second later, it was as if a bomb had gone off. Kesori had blown a hole through the external wall, and a wavering tear in the Weft shimmered through the morning-hazy air of the city. Outside, above, and all around, people cried out in terror, and the apartment building added its steel-girder shrieking to the chorus.

An echo rang through Ghan's nerves. His teeth ached as he moved closer, kicking the artifact from Kesori's limp fingers. Whatever it had already taken from her, it had finished its work: she lay like a child's broken toy. Only human hubris would have dared to imagine itself immune to a device like this. But then again, Ghan remonstrated himself, humans hardly had a monopoly on bad judgment.

A brief hailstorm of plaster chips gave him a moment's warning. He looked up in time to see the ceiling above him shear in half. He dove forward—slow, always too slow—and landed, pinned, in the unfriendly embrace of broken concrete shards.

So much death, so much destruction, and for what? His good arm stretched out in front of him—free, but useless, except to claw at the ugly floor. Beneath him, his seam-ripper lay trapped. He couldn't free it without cutting through himself.

He made himself breathe, a shallow but significant gasp. Enough to go on. With his free hand, he strained as far as he could, scraping his shoulders against the crushing weight.

Instead of purchase, his fingers found the artifact.

His hand jerked as if to throw the thing as far as he could. But he forced himself to disobey the impulse, to close his fist around it tightly. Kesori had used an invocation to activate it before—but that didn't matter. The Drix knew their own ways through the Weft. He didn't call out the first notes of the ritual so much as groan them, but it was enough to snag the wound in the weft and draw it toward himself.

If Sorothir were there, he could have told Ghan this was a truly terrible idea. But Sorothir was *not* there.

And Ghan was so tired of death. Sorothir's, in the line of duty; Kesori's, in pursuit of the impossible; Errit's, too early and so unnecessary.

He ripped the Weft-wound wide open and forced himself through.

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The good news: this was exactly the right place to use the artifact. Even with the chaos-infected technology to orient him, Ghan struggled to incorporate this new dimension in the Weft into his understanding. But it tugged him toward the past—here, the fabric of reality was so much thinner, so rarefied. On the lower planes, the artifact had demanded a huge burst of energy to force its way through; here, which was, in a sense, everywhere, it took far less power to twist a passageway between layers. Between *times*. A human like Kesori, who couldn't walk between worlds unassisted, never had a chance.

The bad news: this was exactly the right place to use the artifact. In Ghan's hand, it pulsed, drawing on the life that sustained him as it reached for a place beyond reality that should never, never be touched. A boiling chaos, a terrible eye that struggled to open into an era long past.

Ghan—a weffhunter, a Drix—refused to be the vessel of their return. His people had ways to exert their will on the Weft. With what breath he had, he filled his mouth with the words of those old, old rites. Sheltering behind ritual, he resisted the artifact's demand; he had space to scramble for whatever control he could steal.

Not *much* control. But enough to force closed that sickening window to a best-forgotten past. Because he was a weffhunter, a Drix, and a stubborn reckless fool who should've known better. And he didn't intend to meet his match in a plaything for Eldrazi cultists. One last gamble, and one he meant to win.

With his remaining strength, he wrenched the artifact's focus sideways toward a more recent past, the prologue to this unorthodox hunt. To Ssata, still within reach—five years back, ten, dozens of strangers blinking in and out of existence in that same sad little apartment. He stretched back further with numbing fingers, with dimming vision, while the artifact's pull hammered at his temples. Even further, and he could make out a half-familiar shape: a human with a smaller shadow in her orbit. Kesori and Errit. Young and hungry and happy. He should warn them—or drag them through to a kinder corner of his own time? A feverish vision of them drinking tea in Jadnis's office sprang to mind, wringing a laugh from him.



Their laughter didn't last. Though he strained to breach that last stretch of time, to press into a stretch of history that had already happened, the distance was too great. It would devour more life than he had left to offer. And he had little enough of that left, these days.

An idea asserted itself: a slippery little idea, greasy, refusing to let him get a grip on it. Yes, Kesori and Errit must stay stranded in their youth—too far, too bad, very sad. But he knew someone, didn't he, who lay buried in a past much closer to hand?

He caught himself leaning toward—*that day. That fight, that protobeing, that blood and ichor. How could I blame a human for failing the trials of temptation when I almost broke without a second thought?*

But he didn't break, even though everything in him longed to. It would be too far to reach back. Not if he still wanted to fix his mistakes. To prevent all the pain riding in the wake of Kesori's quest and his own failures—to save lives, plural. Not just one. Even *that* one. Ruthlessness made the hunter. And sometimes ruthlessness demanded to be turned inward.

"I'm sorry," he said. To himself, and to whatever love was left to listen.

Weftwalking lay beyond his strength now. He weft-crawled, repeating the rites for their comforting familiarity as much as for the safety they offered. When he reached Andenstalay, he pressed himself up against the filmy versions of the city's past and tumbled through time that broke like rotten wood.

In the elevator loading bay, Kesori gasped and jumped back. Not a young woman, but not ravaged, yet, by the demands of the artifact she already held in her hand. Weeks ago, before her days had begun to loop back in on themselves. "What the—are you *okay*, mister?"

Ghan rolled onto his side. "What you're planning," he rasped. "It's not worth it." He held up his version of the artifact, and she reached for it instinctively with the hand already holding her own. The twinned copies tesseract-folded together, with Drix fingers and human ones intertwined, fighting for control.

"Look," said Ghan, too tired to fight and ready to play dirty. He slid his other hand into his robe and took out a tab etched with a name and contact key, dropping it at her feet. "You don't have to go it alone. But Errit wouldn't want you to do this."

Kesori recoiled. "How do you know that name?"

She'd figure it out, or she wouldn't. The moment she let go of the artifact, Ghan bawled out the rites. The lamella crumbled around him like dirt falling into an open grave.

He lost track of how long it took to claw his way back to his own present, where he pawed at the weft-wound until he fell through. A dizzying sight greeted him: a double vision of the apartment's destruction, overlaid on the ugly-but-intact original where—when—he'd first arrived. His seam-ripper lay beneath a concrete shambles; he snatched it up even as the world resolved into a single truth. A truth that involved Ghan lying on his back on scummy tiles now liberally streaked with his own gray-green ichor.

Worse things could be true. Worse things *had* been true. Still were. Nothing to be done about that.

... Maybe *one* thing.

With a whistle that was more spittle than air, Ghan parted a small, surgical cut with his seam-ripper. The artifact vibrated in his hand when he slid it halfway into the opening. But he'd made his choice, and its call didn't reach him anymore. Not in the unprotected places it dug into the first time.

He closed his eyes and sang the ritual through to its ending. The seam sealed. Half of the artifact dropped to the floor with a clatter of finality. Possibilities closed. Stories ended.

Then, it was enough just to breathe. A stretch of scar tissue still knotted itself into the Weft, the outline of the space-time wound left behind by the artifact. It hurt. But it held. And when the ringing in Ghan's ears faded, he heard voices all around. People preparing dinner; children happily shrieking up and down the hallway.

He lifted his communicator to his mouth, letting his arm rest on his chest before threading a line through. "How's the Cail investigation going?" he asked, tasting ichor in the back of his throat, and waited.

"Hello to you, too," said Jadnis chidingly. "You know these things take more time than cleaning up Eldrazi messes. Speaking of which ... when you're done chasing down this artifact, Kesori has—"

He sat up so fast his temples throbbed. "Kesori?"

"My assistant? The one who brought me the Cail lead in the first place? I know you're bad with human names, but this is *embarrassing*." She sighed a sigh that rattled through the Weft. "Kesori has something for you. There's a protobeing emerging, a Kav called Tannuk. Since the Kav aren't part of the Pinnacle, this falls outside the reach of my legal recourse ..."

Ghan laughed wetly, which startled a responding laugh out of Jadnis in turn. When he climbed to his feet, he left his weariness along with his ichor on the kitchen floor. It would catch up to him later, he knew, and charge interest to boot. Most likely when he was about to do something reckless. "I've been told by a reputable source that dealing with the Eldrazi is my job. So, yes. I'm on it." He lifted his seam-ripper, one-handed, and sang out a note to lead him through. "But keep an ear open. Odds are good I'll need some help along the way."