
The Path to Opulent

Greg Weisman

From set *War of the Spark*

I.

Hekara was dead.

That's all I knew.

It was lucky, I guess, that I was standing between Teyo and Mistress Kaya, who were fending off the attacking Eternals. I don't think I could've fended off a housecat right then.

I don't think I would have bothered.

My memories of the next few minutes aren't terribly clear. I think Master Zarek said something about his Beacon summoning more of those Planeswalker types like him and Mistress Kaya and Mister Jura and Mister Beleren and Teyo. I guess there were Planeswalkers appearing all around us. I think one was a minotaur. I dunno.

Hekara was dead.

She should have been a Planeswalker. A Planesdancer. I could picture that. Hekara somersaulting across the Multiverse, visiting different worlds, making them all smile. Drawing a little blood. Or, you know, a *lot* of blood.

Plus, if she were a Planeswalker, she could've planeswalked out of the way of whatever killed her.

"How'd she die?" I asked. But only Teyo was paying any attention to me, and he didn't know.

And then something happened. I *really* hadn't been paying attention to anyone, but I think someone must have cast a spell. Teyo dropped his shield and covered his eyes.

That snapped me out of it. Had to. An Eternal was about to brain my new friend Teyo—my *only* friend Teyo—with a hammer.

Furious, I leapt at it and stabbed it in the eyes. It tottered then fell.

I was seething. I don't ever remember being this angry.

I was prime Gruul material now. My parents would be so proud.

Miss Ballard said, "Not every Planeswalker is Gatewatch material, you know. And some are downright nasty."

And Mister Jura answered, "You have to assume that nasty or not, most Planeswalkers won't be big fans of Nicol Bolas. We need to split up. Spread out through the city. Save as many people as we can and rally every Planeswalker we find."

A bunch of 'em shouted, "Aye!"

Kaya turned to Teyo and me and said, "You two are damn useful. Come with me."

II.

Teyo, bless him, was a natural follower. And I wasn't going to leave him alone to die like I had Hekara, so when *he* followed Mistress Kaya's order to follow her, I followed him. I guess it was a good thing. The streets were dangerous enough that it almost took my mind off Hekara for a little while.

Almost.

Mistress Kaya was trying to get to Orzhova to summon her guild into battle. But we were a long way from the Cathedral Opulent, and phalanxes and crops of the Dreadhorde were scouring the streets of Ravnica, *killing* everyone they found. The saving grace was that, for whatever reason, the Eternals weren't entering any of the buildings. If folks stayed inside, they'd be safe.

For now, at least.

So we crossed Ravnica, through streets, byways, and alleys, and we did a fair decent job of saving people as we went. And because we could tell them to find shelter and stay indoors, we didn't have to worry too much about them afterward. And we never had to chase any Eternals inside ourselves. Which was good, 'cuz fighting in the open was leastways a *bit* safer than taking on these creatures in close quarters.

I mean there were only three of us and Teyo's thing with those light shields was pretty much only defensive.

Don't get me wrong. We needed him.

He had our backs, our fronts, our sides. But I don't think he actually killed a single Eternal.

"You've never killed anyone or anything in your life, have you?" I asked him.

"I killed a spider once."

"A giant spider?"

"How giant is giant?"

"Was it bigger than your thumb?"

"No."

"Then just a regular spider."

"Right. Just a regular spider."

I think he thought I was disappointed in him, then. But I think a part of me was glad he was so what's the word?

Pure. Yeah. So pure.

He was already insecure, and I didn't want to add to that. So I decided then and there to kinda put Hekara in my pocket for the time being. We had Eternals to deal with, and he needed me now. I'd mourn later.

I'd mourn forever.

"I'm glad you're not a killer," I said.

"Uh thanks. It's never really come up before now."

Anyway, we tried to avoid the larger contingents, but we did great against individual Eternals or small crops of 'em. Mistress Kaya did the heavy lifting, so to speak. The creatures seemed particularly vulnerable to her ghost daggers. And they couldn't touch her when she was incorporeal. But they could

still see her, and that made her and Teyo—with his big glowing white shields—good distractions for me. ‘Cuz really, none of the Eternals paid me much mind unless I was already killing ‘em.



Kaya's Ghostform | Art by: Johan Grenier

I'd duck out from behind one of Teyo's diamond-shaped shields, dodge two or three Eternals and then stab one that hadn't seen me coming, usually plunging both daggers into its eyes and deep into its brain. Then I'd be gone before it hit the ground.

Between a couple of these skirmishes, as we crossed a wide but empty street—empty of everything except a handful of corpses that proved Eternals had already been this way—Teyo turned to Kaya and asked, “So are we Gatewatch now?”

“I don't know,” she replied. “Never heard of ‘Gatewatch’ before today. Not entirely clear what it is.”

I said, “The good guys, I think.”

Teyo nodded. “Ravnica's equivalent to the Shieldmage Order.”

Kaya shook her head. “I don't think they're limited to Ravnica. All the members are Planeswalkers. Perhaps they're the Multiverse's equivalent of your Order.”

I shrugged. “So the good guys.”

“Yes.”

“Then I think both of you *are* Gatewatch,” I said. “Not me, of course. I'm not a ‘walker.” I laughed then, as a thought struck my Rat brain: *I'm not Gatewatch; I'm Gateless. That's the Rat. Always Gateless.*

“You've killed more Eternals than I have,” Teyo said. I tried not to roll my eyes, since he hadn't killed any.

Instead I said, “That's such a sweet thing to say, Teyo. You're such a sweet boy. Isn't he a sweet boy, Mistress Kaya?”

“Very sweet.”

He glared at me a bit and said, “I'm pretty sure I'm older than you.”

I ignored him, telling Mistress Kaya, “That’s why I adopted him first thing.” He started to protest or something, but I cut him off. “How’s that cut? I can’t see a scar.”

Thrown a bit, he rubbed his head where the cut used to be. “Fine, I guess. I can’t feel it at all.”

“It was nice of Mister Goldmane to heal it for you. It’s not like he wasn’t busy with other things, what with all the Eternals he was killing left and right. Wasn’t it nice of Mister Goldmane, Mistress Kaya?”

“Very nice,” she said.

By now, we could see the spiky spires of the Cathedral Opulent looming above closer, shorter buildings. Suddenly, Mistress Kaya took off down an alley running diagonally between two buildings. It seemed a strange choice, but I figured she knew what she was doing, so I grabbed Teyo’s hand, and we followed.

About a hundred yards in I realized she was just looking up toward the cathedral, taking the most direct route. I groaned internally and said, “I don’t think we want to go this way.”

“We do,” she replied, “if it’ll get us to Orzhova faster.”

“It’s a dead end.”

She stopped short and turned to face me. “You might have mentioned that sooner.”

“You looked so confident. I thought maybe you knew about a secret passage. I mean there are a lot of secret passages through Ravnica. *A lot*. And I pretty much know all of them—or most of them, anyway. But I figured that Guildmaster Kaya might know one or two I don’t, right?”

“Rat, I’ve been guildmaster for a matter of weeks. I’ve only been on Ravnica for a matter of months. I barely know this city any better than Teyo here.”

“I only arrived this morning,” Teyo said rather needlessly.

“I know that,” Mistress Kaya growled.

I nodded to her. “Right, right. So from now on, the native navigates. This way.”

Still holding Teyo’s hand—*I’m not sure why, I think I just liked holding it*—I pulled him back the way we came. He let himself be dragged behind me. Mistress Kaya followed us.

I heard them coming before I saw them.



Relentless Advance | Art by: Stanton Feng

“Okay,” I said, “maybe back the other way.”

“Why?” she asked. But a split second later she knew. Another crop of Eternals had entered the mouth of the alley. Too many for us to fight in this enclosed space. The minute they spotted us, they charged. We turned and ran.

Mistress Kaya shouted, “You said this was a dead end!”

“It is!”

“Then where are we running to?”

“There’s a door to a speakeasy at the end of the alley. It won’t get us to the cathedral, but if we get inside maybe the creepies will forget about us.

It’s as good a solution as any.

The Eternals were fast, but they weren’t running for their lives. We beat them pretty handily to the end of the alley and the heavy iron door to Krummen’s. Finally letting go of Teyo, I tried the handle. It was locked.

Of course. Why would it be open in daylight?

I banged on the door with both fists. No answer. I knelt and said, “It’s okay. I can pick the lock.”

“So can I,” Kaya said, “but I don’t think there’s time.”

“I’ll buy the time,” Teyo stated. I glanced over my shoulder and saw him chant up a largish diamond shield of white light, separating us from the Eternals just a second or two before they smashed right into it. He grunted painfully but managed to maintain the shield, even expand it into a rectangle that spanned the width of the alleyway so that none of the creatures could slip around it.

“I didn’t know you could do that,” I said, while working the lock.

“Neither did I. Never done it before. But I can use the alley walls to substitute for the geometry. It’s like leaning in.”

"If you say so."

I could hear the weapons of the Eternals slamming against his shield, hear him chanting under his breath and hear him grunt a little in response to every blow. I didn't know how long he'd be able to keep this up.

Something clicked softly. "Got it," I said, standing. I grabbed the door handle, but it still wouldn't budge. "It's unlocked! Must be bolted from the inside!"

Mistress Kaya said, "Leave it to me," and ghosted through the door. She wasn't gone long before her head ghosted back through, and she said, "I'll get it open, but you need to hold out a bit longer."

I looked back at Teyo. He said nothing. But his eyes squinched shut and he nodded once. He was no longer chanting. Just gritting his teeth and leaning toward his shield with both hands, as a lazotep minotaur headbutted it over and over, while the rest of the Eternals smashed maces against it or the butts of their sickle-shaped swords. White light flashed at every impact. The shield wasn't going to hold.

Mistress Kaya must have had the same thought. She ghosted her body back into the alley and drew her daggers, ready to fight.

Fortunately, help came. Once again, I heard the newcomers before I saw them. Heard them whooping and hooting. I smiled and put a hand on Teyo's shoulder. "Just a few more seconds. It'll be all right."

Gruul warriors—Gan Shokta, Domri Rade, Akamal Cray, Govan Radley, Sheeza and Jahdeera, Bombop, and others—attacked the Eternals from behind, axes chopping through lazotep. Tusks piercing. Hammers raining down. Gan Shokta smashed two Eternal heads together with enough force to shatter their skulls into lazotep and bone fragments.

The Eternals instantly forgot about us and turned to face the Gruul. Teyo slumped, dropping his shield. I stood over him protectively with my daggers out, while Mistress Kaya began attacking the creepies from behind.

Domri cut off an Eternal's head with his long, weighted scythe. He glanced over and cackled out, "You must be Guildmaster Kaya, the almighty ghost-assassin. Lucky for you, Domri Rade was here, enjoying the bloody chaos!"

"You're Rade?" Mistress Kaya asked.

I had to suppress a giggle, as Domri looked instantly insulted: "'Course I'm Rade! Who else?"

Domri had always been a dumb little twit. I still couldn't believe he had replaced a fine warrior like Borborygmus as Gruul's new guildmaster. And I really couldn't believe Gan Shokta was following him. On the other hand, I was glad Domri had led everyone here when he had.

So was Mistress Kaya. "I'm grateful," she said begrudgingly.

"Damn right you are!" he said, quite pleased with himself. By this time, most of the Eternals were in pieces on the ground. Domri snorted and shouted to his warriors, "Okay, mates, fun's over here. Let's find us some more!"

The Gruul started to follow him back up the alley, Gan Shokta taking up the rear. Unfortunately, one of the Eternals wasn't quite dead enough. It was missing an arm, but that didn't seem to trouble it much, and it leapt to its feet with a sword in its remaining hand, prepared to stab Gan Shokta in the back.

Teyo reacted even before I did, reaching out a hand and launching a small but solid sphere of white light at the back of the creature's head. It impacted hard, and the Eternal stumbled briefly, making just

enough noise to alert Gan Shokta to the danger. He turned in time to see Teyo hit the creepy with another sphere.

Then Mistress Kaya was on the thing, stabbing up into its guts with both her knives. The Eternal was dying—but didn't seem to know it yet. It was still swinging its sword at Gan Shokta.

So I jumped on creepy's shoulders and stabbed my daggers down into its eyes and deep into its skull. It collapsed under me.

Gan Shokta frowned. I knew he *hated* being saved by outsiders. With some reluctance, he grunted thanks to both Mistress Kaya and Teyo. Ignoring me, he turned and trotted off to catch up to Domri and the rest.

"Who was that?" Teyo asked.

I shrugged. "The big guy? That's Gan Shokta. My father."

III.

So now we were traveling in packs, I guess.

Me and Teyo Verada and Mistress Kaya were now in the company of Gan Shokta, the ogres Govan and Bombop, Akamal, Sheeza and Jahdeera (the viashino twins), and a handful of other Gruul warriors, shamans, and druids all led by *Master* Domri Rade.

We soon ran into a phalanx of Eternals, and midway through the fight, the enemy got all sandwiched between Simic on the left and Izzet on the right.

"Who are they?" Teyo asked.

I nodded left: "Those are Simic Combine forces. Terraformers, super-soldiers, and merfolk led by Bio-mancer Vorel." Then I nodded right: "And those are Izzet League mech-mages—that's Master Zarek's guild—led by his second-in-command, Chamberlain Maree."

"Which one's Maree?"

"The goblin."

"Okay."

"I'm gonna test you on all these names later."

He shot me a panicked look before he realized I was teasing him. Then he glared comically.

I think he likes it when I tease him, you know?

We made short work of that phalanx, and now we were three guilds strong. But the pack just kept growing.

Another battle brought more help: Planeswalkers this time, a merfolk woman named Kiora from a world called Zendikar, and a young human woman named Samut from someplace called Amonkhet, which apparently was where all these Eternals originally came from.

"You couldn't just keep them there," I asked her, as sarcastically as I could.

She ignored the comment and me. I guess she was a little too busy fighting and mourning, mourning and fighting. She knew the names of every single Eternal she killed, knew them I guess from when they were her friends. (Watching her grief, it was hard not to think of Hekara.) She'd kill one and

grimly state, “You are free, Eknet.” Then she’d kill two more and say, “You are free, Temmet. You are free, Neit.”

I wondered if Hekara showed up as a mindless, murderous Eternal whether I’d be able to kill her.

Or would it just be easier to let her kill me?

When the battle ended, we continued on our way, surrounded by this teeming throng of allies.

Mistress Kaya was still trying to get us to Orzhova.

Teyo was staring at Kiora while trying desperately not to make it too obvious.

Shaking my head, I giggled.

“What?” he asked.

“You’ve never seen merfolk before?”

“We don’t have much water on Gobakhan.”

I laughed and pointed at one of the Izzet mech-mages. “You’ve never seen a vedalken?”

“I know people with black skin, brown skin, tawny skin, and tan skin, but I’ve never seen anyone with blue skin before.”

Laughing some more, I nodded in Jahdeera’s direction. “You’ve never seen a viashino?”

“Maybe some of our lizards grow up to be viashino?”

“Ever see a rat before?”

“I’ve seen many rats on Gobakhan. None like you.”

I laughed again and punched him real gentle-like on the arm.

I stole a glance at Gan Shokta, who was marching just behind Domri and none too happy about it. My father was used to following Borborygmus, someone he could respect as a leader and a warrior. It clearly galled him to act as *Master Rade’s* lieutenant, and he stared daggers at Domri’s back. I wanted to reassure him that dumb Domri was an ass, who’d lose control of the Gruul soon enough. But I couldn’t figure out a way to navigate that discussion right then. So I just sighed and continued walking between Teyo and Mistress Kaya.

Besides, we were in another fight soon enough.

We’d come up on a cobblestone-covered hill, where the Dreadhorde had the high ground.

Mister Vorel shouted a command: “Take them out! Take them all out!”

Chamberlain Maree looked ready to tell Mister Vorel what he could do with his orders, but Dumb Domri beat her to the punch with some choice Gruul cursing, which was all kinda pointless, ‘cuz the next thing he did was run uphill, shouting, “C’mon, mates! We don’t need these lab rats teaching us how to knock heads!”

I could read Chamberlain Maree easy enough. She decided she’d rather be Mister Vorel’s ally than follow Dumb Domri’s example.

So it wasn’t the most coordinated of attacks, but Gruul, Simic, and Izzet still stormed the hill together, which was some limited pan-guild progress, I guess.

Of course, we went with ‘em: me and Teyo and Mistress Kaya and Miss Kiora. I looked around for Miss Samut, but she was already ahead of the pack, calling out, “You are free, Haq. You are free, Kawit.”

Just as Teyo and I reached the summit, two more women materialized within arm's reach of us. Both Planeswalkers had warm brown skin, but otherwise Miss Huatli and Miss Saheeli Rai (I learned their names later) couldn't have looked less alike. Miss Huatli was armored and armed, with a long tightly braided black ponytail emerging from beneath her helm. She was short—almost as short as me—but powerfully muscled with searching eyes and a grim mouth. Miss Rai wore a long swirling dress, decorated with shiny gold filigree. She was taller than even Mistress Kaya and wore her hair in swirls atop her head, which made her seem taller still. She was lithe and graceful with curious eyes and a smiling mouth.

Different as they were, they were clearly friends. Attempting to size up the situation, they exchanged a quick glance but stood there doing nothing, a little unsure which side they should be on. Teyo more or less answered the unspoken question by throwing up a shield to block an Eternal axe that might otherwise have split Miss Rai's skull.

"Thank you," she said.

"Yes, my thanks," Miss Huatli echoed.

I had seen enough, so I scurried past them both to get to the fighting. I killed one Eternal just as yet a *third* Planeswalker appeared. This one seemed to be somehow informed of the situation and immediately joined the battle, using her magic to take control of one of the creepies and setting it against all the others. She had long honey-blond hair, a blue-white hooded cloak, and a long crook-staff. She told Miss Kiora that her name was Miss Kasmina or Miss Kasmiri or Mistress Kasmagorica or something. (Okay, it wasn't Mistress Kasmagorica.)



Kasmina's Transmutation | Art by: Uriah Voth

But, yes, even I was having trouble remembering everyone's name by this time.

I lost track of her soon after, but she did some decent damage with her enthralled Eternal right then and there.

So did Miss Huatli, who took to the killing of creepies quite well.

And that shiny little golden hummingbird that Miss Saheeli released sped right through the forehead of one Eternal and emerged out the back of its skull. The Eternal staggered and dropped. I wanted to catch and keep that useful shiny, but the bird never slowed. It repeated its attack on another Eternal and another.
It wasn't all good news. Poor Bombop rushed in too far ahead of the rest of us. He crushed five or six lazotep skulls with his stone hammer, but the Eternals soon swarmed over him, dragging him down to stab him about thirty times before any of us could catch up to help him.

There was also a Simic shaman—I never did get her name—who took a moment too long to cast her spell and wound up beheaded. The fallen head managed to croak out the last few necessary syllables before expiring, and the creepy that killed her *exploded* in a shower of lazotep and goop.

So, yeah. Setbacks, you know?

But the battle was over soon enough. We'd won, and not a single Eternal remained alive—or even undead.

Our pack paused to catch our collective breaths—and then those breaths were stolen away at the sound of a remote but earsplitting *CRACK!* We all turned, and from the top of that hard-won hill, we could see four immense Eternals emerging from the tear in the world to tower over the distant Tenth District Plaza.

I swallowed hard and muttered, “Whoa. Big.”

Miss Samut cursed.

Mistress Kaya asked, “What are they?”

“They are our gods,” Miss Samut said bitterly. “But Bolas killed them or had them killed. Now they are his. His God-Eternals.”

Well, sure. Of course. That's what the day was missing. GOD-Eternals.

We watched in silence for a bit as the four God-Creepies tore apart what appeared to be Vitu-Ghazi, which was strange and horrific for all sorts of reasons, not the least of which was that I couldn't figure out how the World-Tree had gotten to the plaza from its home in Selesnyan territory in the first place.

I felt like crying again.

And then I felt like hitting Dumb Domri when he actually *cheered*: “Woohoo! Ya see that! That was Vitu-Ghazi they trashed! Krokt, they taught those Selesnya droops a lesson!”

A couple of his party boys nodded or grunted their agreement, but the rest of us just stared at him, stunned.

He said, “Gruul, we're fighting on the wrong side! This dragon's shaking things up! He'll tear the guilds down! He'll tear Ravnica down! Isn't that what we've always wanted? When the guilds fall, chaos reigns, and when chaos reigns, the Gruul will rule! Ya hear? We're joining the dragon!”

I fought the urge to stab Dumb Domri in the eyes by looking to see what my father would do. Gan Shokta did not disappoint. He paused, glowering and then said, “Rade, you'd serve that master?”

“Partner, mate, not serve!”

“You don't know the difference, boy. You're no clan leader. You're a follower. I'm going back to Borborygmus.”

Dumb Domri looked stunned. Gan Shokta scowled down at him, then turned and walked away. I watched him go, full of Gruul pride.

Well, it's been a Gruul kinda day for me.

Teyo looked at me. It occurred to me that he thought Gan Shokta should have paid more attention to his daughter. I shrugged. Teyo's a good boy, but he didn't understand my family situation at all.

Which is totally understandable, 'cuz it's kinda odd, and I hadn't actually told him anything about it.

I wasn't *used* to telling people about it, frankly, and I wasn't quite sure how I'd even go about it. But I figured he'd catch on eventually.

Anyway, Dumb Domri pouted for a second or two, before calling out, "Forget Gan Shokta. He's an old droop, too! This is our moment, ya see?"

Mistress Kaya said, "You're a fool, Rade. Bolas doesn't keep faith with those he *chooses* to bargain with. Do you truly believe you can win his favor unbidden?"

But Dumb Domri ignored her, leading his warriors downhill toward the plaza, calling out, "Help's on the way, dragon! We'll knock 'em all down together!"



Domri, Anarch of Bolas | Art by: Raymond Swanland

Kaya looked angry enough to follow and drag him back, and I was angry enough to cut out his fool tongue.

But another crop of Eternals was coming up the other side of the hill. So, with a collective sigh, we all prepared for another fight.

IV.

I couldn't hear the words—they were meant for Planeswalkers, not for someone that was anyone like me—but I felt Mister Beleren's mind-touch like a stone skipping across the liquid surface of my psyche.

But for Mistress Kaya, it was clearly more intense. Distracted—even a little pained—by whatever Mister Beleren had projected, she was nearly split in two by the axe of yet another Eternal minotaur before I pulled her out of the way.

“Did you hear that?” Teyo asked, confused.

“Hear what?” I prompted, while jumping on the minotaur’s back and—unable to reach around its horns to stab it through the eye sockets—plunging my two little daggers into its neck.

We were still amid the pack. The Gruul were gone. Some had followed Dumb Domri. Some had followed my father. But the Simic and Izzet fighters were still with us, as were Miss Samut, Miss Kiora, Miss Rai, and Miss Huatli.

My attack on the bull-headed Eternal did little damage, but it got the creepy’s attention off Mistress Kaya, which was my main goal anyway. I jumped off and scurried away behind one of Teyo’s shields.

The confused minotaur looked around for, well me. It gave Mistress Kaya time to recover and use her own spectral daggers to send that Eternal to its eternal rest.

Suddenly, another Planeswalker—a large viashino with lime-green skin—materialized right in front of us.

He had just enough time to hiss, “What izzzz thissss?” before a female Eternal grabbed him from behind. The Eternal used no weapon on the lizard-man, but what followed was pure horror show: the creepy seemed to draw the viashino’s life force right out of his back, like an Izzet fan sucking up a flame. She absorbed that fire until it glowed from within her lazotep body, glowed brightly enough to create—or at least highlight—cracks in her lazotep shell.

The viashino fell, a lifeless husk, as the Eternal burst into flames from the inside out. Then that fire rocketed into the air, shooting like a comet toward Tenth District Plaza and the dragon. The burned-out Eternal collapsed atop the dead lizard, as if they had been lovers, dying together in a final embrace.

We were lucky Miss Huatli was already killing the last creepy of this particular crop, because everyone else just stood there in total shock.

Just then, I felt Mister Beleren’s mind-touch again. I looked toward a grimacing Teyo, who read my questioning eyes and said, “It was Beleren of the Gatewatch. He said, ‘Retreat. We need a plan. Contact every Planeswalker and guildmaster you can find. Meet us at the Azorius Senate. Now.’”

I guess we have new orders