

Chapter 2: Antiquities

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From set *The Brothers' War*

After Kroog was destroyed while most of its defenders were at his side, Urza vowed that none of his allies would ever need to fear for their own defense again, even while laying siege to a city far from their homes.

—From an anonymous annotation in *The Antiquities War*, by Kayla bin-Kroog, Folio Editione

Dominaria, Present Day

Saheeli had lost count of how many times she'd tested the Temporal Anchor, starting shortly after she arrived on Dominaria just a handful of weeks ago. That first iteration, based heavily on blueprints given to her by Jodah, had been an unmitigated disaster. Apparently, the plans had belonged to an old artificer friend of Teferi's who he insisted got his contraption to work. Saheeli didn't see how. Within five minutes, she'd spotted glaring flaws in the design, many oriented around an alarming lack of protection for the occupant. So, she threw it away and started again. Sadly, her luck didn't change much with her own design.

But she couldn't give up. That wasn't an option.

Saheeli stepped back from her latest version of the Temporal Anchor, coil-shaped like the aether whorls that danced high in Kaladesh's skies. She flipped the switch on her control board, completing the circuit from the powerstone—once the power source to a legendary skyship called *Weatherlight*—to the anchor's central junction. The powerstone, thrumming with intense white light, flickered as it sent energy through tightly wound copper coils into each subsystem.

Saheeli's attention remained on the key subsystem at the heart of the anchor, an artifact Teferi jokingly called a "coffin" that preserved a person's bodily operations while in stasis. In contrast to the original device detailed in Jodah's plans, Saheeli's Temporal Anchor did not transmit matter through the time stream. Instead, it projected a person's spirit backward in time, a function that Teferi insisted upon to bar the chrononaut—himself—from interfering in past events.

Safely separating a body and soul was a difficult task, one that Saheeli had no experience with. Thankfully, she had Kaya in the fold. By extending her ghostform over the coffin with Teferi inside, Kaya could render him entirely incorporeal, perfect for the anchor to do its work.

"Ready?" said Saheeli.

Kaya nodded and stepped inside the atrium where the coffin was suspended. Both Planeswalkers kept their eyes trained on the antenna array atop the anchor, an assembly that focused temporal energies at another of Teferi's artifacts, one he called the Moonsilver Key. None of these names mattered to Saheeli. The artifacts were simply components that contributed to a greater whole.

The room temperature climbed and humidity swelled as power flowed through the anchor. A sweet, pungent scent filled the air, like after a thunderstorm. Tiny dashes of electricity danced upon the anchor's filigreed edges, inching upward to the antenna array like a swarm of glowworms. A conduit of energy, like a shaft of light through smoke, began to form between the array and the Moonsilver Key.

That was Kaya's cue. Her form became hazy as violet tendrils of magical energy wrapped around her, extending over the coffin and anything that would be contained inside. A moment later, a thin red beam of energy shot from the key to the coffin, filling it with a crimson effluvium.

"It's stable!" cried Saheeli. But she spoke too soon. A shower of sparks poured out from a bank of circuitry where the powerstone wires connected to the anchor. *No, no, no! Not again!*

Saheeli flipped the switch to power down the anchor, but it was too late to stop the chain reaction. Kaya leapt out of the anchor and took cover behind an ancient piece of wreckage that Saheeli had refashioned into a heat shield.

"Saheeli!" yelled Kaya. "Get away from there!"

Saheeli didn't hear her. There was still a chance to salvage this test. If she could quickly figure out what went wrong, she could fix it and cement the anchor's viability. Reaching out with her metalworking abilities, she let her consciousness ride the wires inside the machine, the current like a spirited charger, to find exact spot where the disruption started.

What the? . . .

The power couplings hadn't simply burst. They had been torn apart. Raw energy poured out of the circuitry, bypassing the resistors that ensured proper power flow. *Okay. All I need to do is repair the circuit.* She ran over to the damaged section and focused her powers on mending the wires.

Suddenly, a pulse of white light engulfed the whole area. In the same moment, Saheeli felt her entire body grow ice cold. She couldn't breathe but found that she didn't have to. She looked down to see Kaya gripping her hand, extending her ghostform to protect them both from the explosion. Once her initial bewilderment passed, Saheeli noticed something else, some *thing* hovering just a few feet away. She didn't see it as much as feel it—a presence that inspired a profound melancholy in her.

Then Kaya let her go, leaving Saheeli dizzy and gasping for air. She sat on the floor in front of the anchor trying to process what she'd just experienced. None of it made sense. She'd checked every system in the anchor before switching it on. No way a malfunction like that should have happened. And then there was that *thing*.

"Kaya, you're going to think I'm crazy—"

"You're not crazy," said Kaya. "I saw it, too."

"You did? What do you think it was?"

"I know what it was, and I know what caused it." She led Saheeli, careful to step around the metal shards that had once been part of the anchor, to an innocuous-looking crate shoved underneath one of the workbenches. "There."

Saheeli pulled out the crate and uncovered it to reveal a black crystal orb encased in a cage of silver. This only confused her more. "Teferi gave it to me along with the other artifacts to create the anchor. He insisted it was important, but I couldn't figure out what it did or even what it was. So I stored it away."

"Let's find him," said Kaya. "Because I want to know why this thing is creating ghosts."

Kaladesh, Years Ago

Saheeli recognized a piece by Shanti Makam in the far corner of the room, a cat-sized sculpture of living metal that changed shape in response to the sounds around it. In the center of the fine ebony-wood table she sat at was a prototype model of Jitya Reyath's aether crucible, a steady trickle of raw blue aether bubbling up from its center. Both one-of-a-kind pieces had been stolen from the Ghirapur

Institute of Art and Science one month before. Other baubles of similar opulence decorated the room, all tinged with the fact that they'd been liberated from their rightful owners across the city.

The thugs had taken her at the perfect time—for them at least. Like most of the population of the city, she'd attended the spring festival, replete with dancers in flowing, patterned outfits filling the streets with muslin spirals of purple, pink, and orange. All strata of society flooded public squares to share food and gossip while fleets of kites fluttered overhead. Her kidnappers merely had to wait amid the raucous chaos until she stepped in front of the right alleyway.

The next thing she knew, she woke up tied to a chair in this place. The light was minimal—small lanterns adorned the tops of tables next to luxurious couches that probably cost more than her house. The two men that had grabbed her stood on either side of her, and across the table from her sat the erstwhile host of this private soirée, clad all in black save for a faceplate of finely inlaid gold. With a single hand motion, the host ordered the men to leave. Saheeli turned her head to see where they were going when the host stopped her.

"Oh, don't look back," said the host in a deep, echoing baritone. "No matter the predicament, you must never turn away from what's most important."

"Or most dangerous."

"Saheeli Rai, youngest artificer to ever be invited to the Institute. Daughter to Aarav and Ruby, sister to Sheela, Amika, and Sahil. A decent, law-abiding citizen of Ghirapur with a few petty violations that are common among youth. Is all this correct?"

"You know a lot about me."

"No, I know *everything* about you," said the host. "But my manners such a disparity between us is uncivil. Let me introduce myself. I am—"

"Gonti, lord of the Night Market."

"Ha. I knew I chose the right person for this job. But then, who I am is hardly a test for your intellect. Let me give you a better one." Leaning back, Gonti unfastened the buttons on their shirt, from top to bottom, exposing their chest for Saheeli to see. She'd seen aetherborn skin up close before, finding it to have the look and feel of smooth chalk. But that's not what she saw under Gonti's shirt. Their "flesh" had the look of cracked stone, hard and strong, and embedded in their chest was a metal device made of rotating gears. "Thoughts?"

Yes, she had thoughts. There'd always been conjecture on just who Gonti was, since their reign over Ghirapur's underworld had lasted well longer than an aetherborn's lifespan. Now she had the answer. "Am I here to gawk?"

"Hardly." Gonti reached under the table and produced a small bag, which they slid over to Saheeli. She looked inside to discover a suite of tools any artificer would be envious of: diamond tipped tweezers, an array of loupes, pliers, cutters, and vices optimized for delicate tasks. "My heart," Gonti said, tapping the mechanism in his chest. "It has begun to fail. I don't believe I can adequately describe what it's like to feel yourself wasting away in real time. You're here to fix it."

Here was the criminal mastermind of the city, responsible for theft, corruption, and murder—and they brought her here to save their life? No. That wasn't happening. Saheeli could bring about more peace in Ghirapur than the Consulate ever had by doing nothing. "I think it's beyond my knowledge to help," she said. "I'm sorry."

"You disappoint me. I thought you'd be eager to explore such a rare invention. But I can't say this wasn't expected." Gonti reached into the front pocket of their shirt, pulled out a slim golden chain, and

slid it across the table. Saheeli caught it and held it up to look at. Gold shaped into ivy with amethyst flowers. This was her mother's bracelet. She'd know it anywhere.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Don't play the fool," said Gonti. "It's quite obvious. My associates have already gathered your family members inside your place of residence. If I don't send word in the allotted time, their instructions are to execute everyone. Starting with your mother."

Saheeli clutched her mother's bracelet and pressed it to her forehead. "You're a monster."

"One with little time to spare. Much like yourself."

Dominaria, Present Day

Teferi was nowhere to be found, but Saheeli and Kaya were able to track Jodah down in one of the many unused chambers inside the tower. He sat on the ground with his legs folded, speaking into what looked like a cloud of shimmering mercury that hung in the air.

"You're such a mother," he said to the person appearing inside the cloud, a woman with tan skin and dark, red-streaked hair. "Teferi's fine. Better than fine, all things considered."

"He's still bent on going back?" asked the woman.

Jodah threw his arms up. "There isn't much of a choice."

"Time travel," she said, shaking her head. "I hope he knows what he's doing."

"It could be worse. He could have decided to go back and talk to—"

Standing in the doorway with Kaya, Saheeli cleared her throat loudly. Jodah looked up from his conversation. He put on an uneasy smile and held up his hand in a "one moment" gesture.

"Jhoira, I've got to go," he said, standing up. "Give my love to Adeliz."

"You could contact her yourself, you know."

"Yes, but then we'd have to catch up and explain our current projects. Something inevitably would come up, cutting our chat short, and by the time we could resume, so much would have happened that we'd have to do it all over again."

"You two are so alike. It's annoying."

"You mean endearing, right?"

"No," she said as the cloud began to dissipate. "Take care of yourself, Jodah."

"You, too." Jodah turned to the Planeswalkers waiting at the door. "My apologies. What can I do for you two?"

Saheeli didn't mince words: "We believe that a spirit has been sabotaging the Temporal Anchor and that it is being created by whatever this black orb is that Teferi gave me."

"Wait, wait. Slow down," Jodah said. "Exactly how does one *create* ghosts? I mean apart from the obvious way of, you know, killing people."

"Maybe 'creating' is the wrong word," said Kaya. "More like strengthening a spirit that's already there. The longer a spirit is left on a physical plane, the more indistinct it becomes, like a mist in a breeze, unless something comes along to give it enough energy to fully form again. I saw a silver cord extending from the orb to the spirit. A direct channel of psychic energy."

"Assuming you're right," Jodah began, "couldn't you just move the orb out of the workshop? Even take it away to another plane?"

"It's been around for weeks," said Kaya. "The spirit has been gorging itself that whole time. It could take centuries before it dissipates enough to leave us alone."

Jodah accompanied them back to the scene of the incident to give his own impressions. When they arrived, Saheeli gingerly led Jodah around sharp debris to show him Teferi's mysterious orb. He touched the silver cage with his fingers and poked the crystal orb inside with the end of his staff. Soft lights inside the orb winked in and out of existence. He prodded a bit more before taking the orb and turning it over to look at its underside. He ran his fingers over the same small patch of silver again and again.

"Dammit, Urza," he said, hanging his head. "What have you done now?"

"Who?" asked Kaya.

"Urza," he replied. "The man who built this tower. The Planeswalker who vanquished the Phyrexians when they invaded this plane a millennia ago. Teferi's teacher. And my ancestor."

"And you didn't say anything about it because?"

"Because family matters are rarely simple." Jodah placed the orb onto the table, uttered a spell, and gathered the others around to see part of the orb's silver cage begin to glow red. "I don't suppose you noticed the script hidden in the silver mesh."

Saheeli hadn't. But with Jodah's spell, she could plainly see a faint inscription. Even if she had seen it before, she would have dismissed the series of geometric shapes laid on top of each other—squares, triangles, and circles repeating and overlapping with no discernible pattern—as an artificer's signature.

"It's the written language of the Thran, an ancient civilization on this plane," said Jodah. "Few people alive in the last five thousand years could read their language. I can. Urza and the Tolarians under his tutelage could as well. I have little doubt that this orb is his doing."

"What does the message say?"

"Go back to the beginning and greet me properly."

"What does that mean?" asked Saheeli. "Could it be Urza disrupting the anchor?"

"For many reasons, I'm confident that Urza is not the spirit in question," answered Jodah. "As for the meaning of the message, all I know for sure is if Urza is involved, it's probably trouble."

Another evasive answer, Saheeli noted. While she hadn't known Jodah for as long as Teferi or certainly members of the Gatewatch, she would have liked to think the past few weeks together had engendered some manner of rapport between them. They'd eaten together, chatted over tea, exchanged stories. They were on Dominaira ostensibly working toward a common purpose of thwarting the Phyrexians—a threat that endangered countless planes, including her own. There was no room for hiding such important information.

"All the more reason to take care of this thing quickly," said Kaya. "And permanently."

"Hold on," said Saheeli. "That spirit was once a living being, right? Wouldn't it be better if we could find out what it wants?"

Kaya sunk into her seat. "Lingering spirits only want a few things—most of them bad. But I'll hear you out. What do you propose?"

"The way you talked about them before—it was as if they were energy beings."

"Sure," said Kaya. "What's the soul but energy driven by will?"

"Exactly. I think I have something that could help us deal with our visitor."

Kaladesh, Years Ago

"Incredible," Saheeli blurted out before she could stop herself. The last thing she wanted to give Gonti was the satisfaction of being right about her. Despite the circumstances, a part of her was thrilled to examine such a marvel of engineering so closely. The heart didn't merely prolong Gonti's existence—a feat to be sure, but nothing compared to what it constituted. At the center of the heart was a honeycomb-shaped module that pulled aether directly from the atmosphere. Fresh raw aether continually circulated through Gonti, renewing their body. Forever.

In short, Gonti was immortal.

"How much longer?" Gonti asked. They lay still, a model of a patient, upon their expensive boardroom table. Gonti didn't so much as twitch as she probed and prodded them.

"It's a delicate process," said Saheeli, lifting feather-light, semi-transparent membranes inside the heart with tapered tweezers. "It requires all my concentration."

"Not all," they said. "Your dedication—to your craft, to your family—is certain. But I can also sense your rebelliousness, a scent like cut cloves." Saheeli quietly cursed. Like all the other aetherborn she'd encountered, Gonti had the ability to read emotions and interpret them as various scents. Here, with no one else around, it was impossible to hide even her deepest thoughts. "It is understandable. Conflict is the natural state of things, even within an individual."

"Easy for you to say when you steal and kill for a living."

"How amusingly naive."

Naive? Where were they when the Consulate sweeps rounded up the homeless to satisfy the aristocrats seeking scapegoats for crimes Gonti and his cronies committed? How many innocents were caught in the crossfire between warring factions of Gonti's own people squabbling over profits? And how many more lived in fear of losing their homes and livelihoods to their greed? She turned back to the heart, but like before, she couldn't stop herself from saying what was on her mind. "I wish we could live in peace without you destroying our lives."

Gonti's tone grew grim. "I remember a time when my kind were hunted like animals. People knew what we were; they just were very irritated *that* we were. Do not talk of destroyed lives when you have no idea what that means."

Saheeli wanted to rebut Gonti, but what could she say? They were right. The first aetherborn were chased and killed by engineers who dismissed them as a side effect of aether refinement. A mistake. Yes, things had changed for the better, but what of the past? How does a society repair that kind of damage?

She didn't have the answers, and it wasn't her place at that moment to pursue them. All she could do was protect her family the best she could. Digging deep into Gonti's chest, she located the problem. The core of the aether heart was comprised of a revolving silver filament no bigger than a fingernail. The filament's motion governed the cadence with which the gears churned aether, much like a human heart pumped blood in regular intervals. A small fracture in the filament had developed over time—the simplest of repairs to make. Saheeli tapped her finger on the filament, its surface rippling like water until the crack was healed.

"I've fixed the damage," said Saheeli. "Do you feel any different?"

At first, Gonti was silent. Slowly, they sat up and turned to her. "I feel magnificent."

"Then tell your men to stand down."

"I already did," said Gonti as they buttoned up their shirt. "Those two I sent before we began talking conveyed the message. Your family was never in any danger. Consider it an act of faith. In you."

Saheeli began shaking—not out of anger, but of joyful relief.

Gonti hopped off the table, stopping to lament a scuff mark on the surface. They extended a hand for Saheeli to take, which she did, not wanting to anger Gonti enough to place her family back into danger. They led her to a window at the far rear of the room. Drawing back the curtains, Gonti revealed a stunning view of Ghirapur, its high spires decorated with lights for the spring festival. Down below, thousands reveled in the streets. "My city. Beautiful, isn't it? We are allied now, but make no mistake, it brought its war to me first, like it did all aetherborn. Instead of crumpling, I embraced its thick, spiny hide. To win a war, you must *become* the war. That is the way of things."

Dominaria, Present Day

Saheeli flipped the power switch on the Temporal Anchor for the second time that day. The apparatus charged up in its normal fashion—energy routing from the powerstone into the rest of the anchor, Kaya in place waiting for her part to play out. Looking around the workshop, she wondered if the spirit was lurking unseen, watching her every action.

She hoped so.

"Kaya, are you ready?" Saheeli called out.

"Yes," she said, placing her hands on the coffin. "I hope this works."

The energy conduit began to materialize between the antenna array and the Moonsilver Key. Saheeli kept still, her gaze locked on Kaya. The only movement she dared to make was to slide her finger from the power switch on her control board to a second one. Kaya became incorporeal, filling the anchor's atrium with violet wisps of magic. Everything had to seem like they were just trying another test. That was the bait.

Where are you? Saheeli wondered.

"It's here!" yelled Kaya. "Do it now!"

Saheeli flipped the second switch, shunting power from the anchor's normal operations to a newly built subsystem. Instead of absorbing and directing the antenna's signal, the Moonsilver Key began to revolve, causing the air in the room to feel thick. A greenish fog rose from the floor as a sudden nausea bubbled up from her stomach, forcing her to lean on her worktable.

There in front of the anchor, a gray shape began to take form like frost on a pane of glass. Limbs defined themselves, as did a head and torso. Then more—the face of a man, worn and tired, his beard unshorn and wild; a heavy suit of armor emblazoned with the head of a lion.

"Who are you?" Saheeli yelled, pushing herself to her feet.

Shock streaked across the spirit's face. It turned to flee, but found itself slowed, unable to take more than a few halting steps away from the anchor. Saheeli's trap worked! By replicating the cadence of energy pumping through Gonti's aether heart, Saheeli had succeeded in giving the spirit a semblance of solidity. Without its ability to dissolve or pass through solid barriers, it would have no choice but to communicate with her.

"We don't mean to hurt you! Tell us what you want!"

The spirit hesitated, allowing her to extend her hand in a sign of friendship. It responded by shoving her to the ground, its touch frigid, like freshly turned dirt on a grave. Unbuckling a ghostly blade from

its belt, the spirit raised its weapon above its head. Kaya sprang into action, diving to the floor to pull Saheeli out of harm's way. But Saheeli was never its target. The blade struck the anchor, gouging a deep gash into its side. Kaya hurled a blade at the spirit, but it had already fled out the workshop door.

"Are you alright?" she asked Saheeli. Kaya's concern didn't fully mask her frustration. She'd been doubtful about Saheeli's attempt at communication and turned out to be right.

"I'm not hurt."

"Good. Make sure the anchor is okay. I'm going after it."

Kaya bolted out the door leaving Saheeli to assess the anchor. While the damage was severe—the power stabilization subsystem had been hacked to pieces—the key and the coffin were untouched. Repairs would be extensive but doable. Saheeli sighed, but the relief was short-lived. She hurried out the door to track Kaya down, hoping to reach her before the ghost assassin. It had understood her. If the situation were calmer, a dialogue was possible.

Saheeli ran through the tunnels connecting the workshop to the tower proper, emerging into the corridor that encircled the main hall. She spotted Jodah across the way. While she and Kaya were working to modify the anchor, he'd sequestered himself with the Starfield Orb to glean any answers he could.

"Where is Kaya?" she called out.

"I saw her go upstairs," said Jodah. "Follow me!"

Saheeli and Jodah ran up to the second floor of the orniary where they saw Kaya, daggers in hand, face to face with the partially solid spirit, its own chunky, squarish blade held at the ready.

"It's disintegrating fast," said Kaya. "If we don't take care of it now, it'll be a lot harder to pin down." Kaya was right if the goal was to destroy the spirit. But Saheeli clung to the notion that a peace could be reached. She knew it was foolish. She knew it had cost them precious time. But the thought of inflicting needless harm did not sit well with her.

"My name is Saheeli Rai," she said. "What's yours?"

"Sharaman," the spirit said, keeping its weapon raised.

"General Sharaman," said Jodah. "The leader of Urza's armies."

"Are you here on behalf of that snake?" said Sharaman, his form wavering.

"Your war is almost five thousand years over with," said Jodah. "If this is about revenge—"

"Not revenge. Preservation. You would restart Urza's war machine."

"I'm sorry for what happened to you," said Saheeli. "But the foes we fight—they are a threat to all the people of Dominaria and planes beyond."

"I served Urza faithfully for decades. My nephews. Good boys. I cradled their corpses split apart by Mishra's dragon engines." His form became hazier as the effects of Saheeli's trap weakened. "I stood by while he ordered the sacking of Sardia and other provinces that wouldn't give over their resources. I thought that history would forgive us because we were the righteous ones." He looked straight at Saheeli. "I will not let anyone repeat the mistakes I made. If that means stopping you, I will do so."

"I " She didn't know what to do. Sharaman wasn't just some temperamental spirit. He had lost so much—his family, his life. She had to convince him that their efforts were necessary. "Sharaman, there must be some way—"

Kaya didn't wait for Saheeli to finish. As Sharaman faded from view, she activated her ghostform and lunged at the spirit, her ethereal form swelling into a wave of death. She swung out with her dagger,

parrying a strike that only she could see, then spun around with a backward stab. Saheeli watched as Kaya dropped her weapon and knelt. Kaya's lips moved, but Saheeli heard no sound. She walked to where Kaya was kneeling and waited for her to rematerialize.

Kaya stood up, visibly shaken. "I'm sorry. He didn't give us much choice."

Teferi rested his head against the padding inside of the coffin, his smiling face visible through a small porthole. He'd been in surprisingly good spirits when he came in for the test, a far cry from his pensiveness during his morning visit. Saheeli hoped that she could find the solace that he'd somehow found. A quiet walk around the tower environs, perhaps. Yes, that could help.

Saheeli did her final review of the Temporal Anchor. All subsystems checked out, both old and new. She nodded to Kaya, giving her the go-ahead to step into the anchor for what she hoped would be a successful run. Ever since the confrontation with Sharaman, Kaya's usual swagger had been missing.

"Are you sure you're okay to do this now?" asked Saheeli.

"This is too important to delay."

"That wasn't my question."

She smiled. "I wish I was more like you—a good person."

"You are a good person, Kaya," said Saheeli.

She shook her head. "Sharaman wasn't ever going to relent. That's how spirits are. Their obsessions are what root them to the physical world. Those I'd dealt with before—they were tyrants, villains, the worst of the worst. I could justify giving them the punishment they deserved. But him?"

"Did he say something to you at the end?"

"He wanted to know if he would see his family again," said Kaya. "I told him that he would." With that, Kaya stepped into the anchor and got into position. "Let's do this."

Saheeli switched on the anchor. It whirled to life. Energy channeled upward to the antenna, then through the Moonsilver Key, and finally into the coffin containing Teferi within Kaya's ghostform.

The anchor was going to work. Saheeli knew it already. Turning away for just a moment, Saheeli allowed her thoughts to wander. She thought back to that night on Kaladesh years ago, walking into her house after leaving Gonti's estate. Tables of hot food and cold drinks, maintained by servo constructs. A gaggle of her younger cousins who, by the look of their costumes, had taken part in the spring dances for the first time. The warmth she felt in her family's embrace. A warmth that enveloped her like a single fingerstroke on the back of a hand, like measured steps upon Ravnican cobblestones, like Huatli's lips—the most perfect in all the Multiverse—forming the words, *I will come dance with you*.

Unlike Gonti, Saheeli hadn't given up on peace. But if those she loved needed her to, she would become the war.

Epilogue

Teferi had mentioned the Starfield Orb to Jodah once, explaining how he'd obtained it in one of the hidden caches Urza left behind sometime during the Phyrexian Invasion. But he downplayed the orb's significance. Maybe it had confounded him? No, it was more likely that Teferi erred on the side of wisdom by assuming the orb was too dangerous to fiddle with. Jodah would have done the same, especially after detecting the use of soul energy in the orb's enchantments. No wonder it affected spirits like it did. Urza had truly fallen into dark practices in his final days.

Jodah regretted not being forthright with the others about the orb—or Urza and the tower, for that matter. He'd done it to protect them, but he still disliked keeping secrets from his allies, Saheeli especially. In Jodah's estimation, she was the perfect collaborator for Teferi to have recruited for their efforts. Adept, yet compassionate. Unlike so many of the Planeswalkers he'd dealt with over the centuries—even the ones he held dear, like Freyalise (eventually)—Saheeli's humanity always shone through.

She was a better person than he or Teferi had been in their youth.

Hours past midnight, Jodah sat at the base of one of the outer watchtowers, the Starfield Orb on the ground in front of him. If anyone was going to put himself at risk to investigate one of Urza's many schemes, it was going to be him.

He began to cast a spell.

It was a child's magic. Jhoira was the first to show it to him back when they'd been more than the distant friends they were today. She'd grown tired, as she often did, of his pedantic complaints about this professor or that at Tolaria West. So, she cast a spell on him, shocking him into silence. Between bouts of laughing, she explained that it was the very first spell she'd learned from Teferi, one that jolted a person with a rather strong electric shock. It was infamous among the students of Tolarian Academy; the professors, too, eventually learned to refrain from shaking Teferi's hand. Yes, that included Urza.

Go back to the beginning and greet me properly.

Jodah held his hand out, directing the shock at the orb. In a blue flash, the world vanished, replaced a moment later by the interior of an austere cottage. The room was illuminated, but there didn't seem to be any origin for the light. Jodah found himself seated at a grand table. On top, a vast array of toy figurines almost impossibly small—soldiers, some on horseback, against a squadron of mechanical dragons—were in a simulated battle.

"Urza, you old git," he said softly. "A pocket dimension." And not just any. This pocket dimension was made to resemble the cabin Urza lived in more than a thousand years before. It had been located in the Ohran Mountains on the isle of Gulmany, a fact Jodah knew because he'd paid it a visit once upon a time.

He got up to look over a tall bookshelf packed with thick manuscripts, recognizing the names of several volumes long thought lost. One caught his eye. He plucked it off the shelf and inspected the cover, sinking his fingertips into the worn grooves in the leather. *Calfskin emblazoned with a lion's head—the symbol of Argive*, he noted. Flipping through the pages, he stopped on a diagram of an ornithopter, pointing out the small capital *T* in the corner of the page. *Stamped woodcuts of original illustrations by the artificer, Tawnos*. Then he turned to the title page.

"*The Antiquities War* by Kayla bin-Kroog," a voice behind him announced. Jodah spun around to see a woman in padded armor, her hair pulled back from her angular face. "That's the folio edition," she said. "Produced to commemorate the first gathering of the Sages of Minorad. There are several copies of this work on the shelf, all different editions, from scroll to tome."

"I know you," said Jodah. "Xantcha. You were Urza's companion."

"In my dreams, I am Xantcha," the woman said. "But I am not her. Everything she was is contained within the golem, Karn."

"What are you, then?"

"A construct, like all you see here."

Jodah had met the real Xantcha briefly. She was curious, almost like a child, and asked him all manner of questions about Dominarian history and distant lands. Jodah remembered thinking how odd a

pairing she and Urza made, but also that her presence seemed to mollify the most abrasive parts of his personality.

A door at the far side of the room opened, and stepping inside was another individual, this one a man, stout and severe, with dark hair and a harried brow. Flipping back through *The Antiquities War* again, Jodah arrived at a portrait that matched the man.

"Mishra," said Jodah. "You are a construct as well."

"You do not match the description of Teferi," Mishra said before drawing a short sword and pointing it at Jodah. "You're an intruder."

"Hold," Xantcha ordered, then turned to Jodah. "Who are you, and what is your purpose here?"

"My name is Jodah, friend of Teferi's and descendant of Urza," said Jodah. "How else would I have gained access to this place?"

That seemed to satisfy them. They stood down, allowing Jodah to continue examining the bookshelf. He placed back *The Antiquities War* and picked out a roughly bound file of pages from the very bottom shelf. This was a collection of schematics, plans—all the instructions needed to rebuild Urza's armies of Yotian soldiers and clay statues. A smaller folder within the file contained even more arcane information on familial lineages along with a grand design of disparate objects all united into a singular weapon.

"The Legacy," said Jodah. "This whole place—it's Urza's failsafe in case he perished before he could deploy it against the Phyrexians." He laughed, remembering what Teferi had said about obtaining the orb. *It was like Urza targeted every weakness of mine. But I beat him!* No, no one ever beat Urza at that kind of mind game. He'd put nigh-impossible obstacles in front of the orb *because* he knew that only Teferi would have the mettle and audacity to overcome them.

Jodah closed the file and held his hand on the cover. Xantcha and Mishra had been watching him the entire time, their blank expressions never changing.

"Teferi has his hands full right now," he told them. "But when all of that has passed, and when he's ready, I will tell him about this place. In the meantime, did your master leave any final words?"

"Yes," said Mishra. "'Let us end our conflicts. We cannot afford to differ any longer.'"