
Episode 4: Beneath Eyes Unblinking

K. Arsenault Rivera

From set *March of the Machine*

17. 04. 2023

To battle and bravery born, to battle and bravery Tyvar Kell returns—with boasts upon his lips, and black tidings in his heart.

Skemfar welcomes its wayward son with open arms. After the ozone-laden atmosphere of New Phyrexia and the acrid safe house swamp in Dominaria, it is a welcome thing to breathe good forest air into his lungs.

But the moment he arrives he knows he is too late. It is not to welcoming cheers he returns but to the clatter of swords against metal, the howl of arrows in flight and the screams of the pierced. In the distance, a sanguine ophidian the size of a mountain strangles the World Tree. White armor, glacier thick, protects it. Pods fall—the shed scales of this foul serpent—and the ground trembles with every arrival, each one met with the hammer of war.

War drums beat in time with his own wild heart as he pushes his way into the melee. Glory drives his limbs. He ducks the scythe-like limb of an enemy, changes his own arm to metal, drives it through the thing's head. An instant later he's swaying out of the way of an axe as it takes out another. A cheer ringing out behind him gladdens his heart—the end of days has come to Kaldheim, and the elves of Skemfar meet it head-on.

Tyvar sees his brother fighting alongside his people, surrounded by skalds and banners.

"Here for the dregs?" Harald calls to him. "There'll be plenty."

"And more coming," Tyvar says. Something that was once a giant hurls a boulder toward them; the others scatter, but Tyvar plants his feet. From the earth he draws his strength—and with a single blow shatters the rock. He grins. "You must have been struggling before I returned."

Harald shakes his head. "Enough of that. Do you know anything that can help us? Who are these creatures?"

"Phyrexians," Tyvar answers. A scream takes his attention—one of the elves has found himself caught in the belly of a giant skeletal wolf. Tyvar winces. "See there—they'll bathe him in oil, and then he'll be more metal than elf. After that, the changes start. Won't be long before he'd tear off his own father's skin."

A dozen warriors meet the hound, two coming in on each side to flank. Hammers ring against steel.

"They won't stop until everything in Kaldheim's like they are. I've been to their home, brother—it is lifeless, without song." He swallows. The next part isn't easy to say, and yet it must be said: "This isn't an enemy the elves can vanquish alone."

The Cosmos itself reinforces his grim warning. The ground roars and shakes beneath their feet, white light leaking up from the opening crevices. Tyvar knocks against his brother. Harald steadies him, then points to the opening doomskar. “It seems we won’t be alone for long.”

Phyrexians and elves alike plummet into the hungry earth. Shifting lights render them silhouettes as the Cosmos claims them. Unsated, the light creeps higher and higher still—until at last torrents of water emerge. Tyvar scrambles, sinking to the ground, creating a platform for him and his people. His muscles strain under the force of his magic, shifting between rock and water, rock and water.

When he sees the first of the longboats cresting the water, Tyvar knows he’s going to be at this for a while. Maybe longer than he can manage. If he fails, the elves will be washed away as surely as the Phyrexians. The lives of his people are in his hands.

He can’t fail.

Tyvar Kell bellows a war cry. As his body battles the tides and the rock, he feels alive.

And while he’s doing the simple thing, his brother handles what’s more complicated. Omenseekers aboard the ships call out to the stranded elves, their captain leading, “It is the end of all things. Will the elves come and join the fight?”

“The elves will lead it!” is Harald’s proud answer. “Onto the ships!”

Tyvar’s shoulders tremble with effort and yet he holds fast to the earth. Each pair of fleeing feet shrinks the platform. Smaller and smaller, until only he and Harald remain on the rock.

He can hardly believe what he sees when he looks at the ships.

Dwarves and humans, ghostly fallen heroes, undead warriors, Karfell barbarians, fire giants wading through the seas, trolls beating war drums—has everyone on Kaldheim banded together? Tyvar can’t recall seeing so many different faces in one place outside of a battlefield.

New Phyrexia planted the seeds of doubt and fear deep within him. The oil, and the changing of his newfound comrades, nurtured it. But this? This true unity?

This is an axe.

Harald climbs onto the ship first. He stretches out a hand toward Tyvar, who instead leaps onto the longship of his own accord. Beneath them the platform crumbles away into Skemfar’s new river.

“Warriors!” Harald calls. The sigils and guides along the sides of the ship begin to glow. “Our grudges are ancient. A single battle shall not wipe clean the slate of old wrongs. When the morrow comes, all of us will once more be enemies!”

Tyvar’s heart thrums in time with the beating drums, the sounding horns. Ships pick up speed. When Harald spoke even his most hated enemies waited to hear what he had to say. He does not know where they are going, but he knows that wherever they land, glory awaits.

White swallows them. For an instant, they enter the Cosmos, dazzling and infinite. Unearthly beasts lope alongside the boats—wolves, ravens, bears, even a squirrel.

“But that is only if we live to greet the morrow, my brothers and sisters in arms. Today, the valkyries will have their choice of heroes; today is a day the skalds shall sing of for centuries. Will your descendants name you a hero, or a coward?”

Light once more. Tyvar doesn’t shut his eyes, no matter how the patterns sear at his irises.

When at last the light recedes, they find themselves above a churning ocean. Somehow, they're airborne—he leaves no time to question it, only lets it thrill his blood. Valkyries fly alongside them toward the sharp barbs of the Invasion Tree, yet to find their home. Divine arrows streak light across the reddening sky. The World Tree looms, its foul mirror descending down, down, down. From here he can count every bump of its spine, every pod nestled within.

There must be thousands. Tens of thousands, maybe, each with their own complement of soldiers, and each of those soldiers a fearsome foe. This was an enemy almost unstoppable: worse, those who died in defense of Kaldheim would rise, corrupted, to fight for the invaders who sought to destroy the land they once called home.

The odds, he knows, are not good.



Art by: Bryan Sola

“If Kaldheim survives, let it survive because we fought! If it dies, let it die a warrior’s death, axe in hand, a boast on its lips, and mead in its belly!”

Beneath them the water bubbles. Just as the longboats erupt in a warrior’s song, the seas too erupt.

The tattoos on Tyvar’s shoulders tingle. All elves grew in the shadow of Koma. Ever changing, ever growing, quick as lightning and wily besides—is there any better creature to emulate than a serpent?

But that is not true of the serpent he sees now, the creature that rises from the depths of the sea. Sleek scales of metal, sharp bones along the ridges of its mouth, porcelain plating in place of eyes—whatever this creature once was, it is now unmistakably one of Elesh Norn’s creations.

Already the eyeless monstrosity has snapped a longship between its jaws. Wood groans and warriors cry, tumbling great distances to their deaths. From others, a hail of arrows, stones, thrown axes—whatever they might get ahold of.

All bounce off the creature’s strange carapace.

Tyvar takes a step onto the boat’s railing. In the flickering light of what might be Kaldheim’s last war, the edge of his blade gleams bright.

Below him, the mouth of the serpent: within it, New Phyrexia, and all his fears made manifest.

He doesn't like being afraid.

With the seething song of battle at his back and a cry from his chest, Tyvar leaps from the ship.

However the story of this day ends, the sagas will tell he was no coward.

Pia Nalaar has spent the last ten years of her life fighting for a better Kaladesh.

Most of that work's been undone in one day.

No—the truth is it's been a week, at least. Saheeli warned her then that something like this might happen, that something was going to happen. The clouds held proof, she'd said. In place of the swirls that so often dominated the skies of Kaladesh, she'd shown Pia the new shape that had come to dominate them.

"We have to be ready for an invasion," Saheeli had said.

"Chandra and the others have a handle on it."

She was so confident. So certain. She didn't want to believe that it could be otherwise. After all that had happened, after all the struggles and wars—the Gatewatch must understand what needs doing. They must be able to handle it. Then one morning Pia spilled ink on her desk. When she grabbed a cloth to clean up the mess, the symbol—like an unblinking eye—stared back up at her in viscous black.

The memory was bad enough, but after the first spill she saw it everywhere she looked: in scrolls curled up on a shelf, in a plate of noodles she had not the stomach to finish, in trees and in currents of water.

Every day she awoke hoping that they'd fade, that she'd not see them, that Chandra would stroll back into her home for their monthly tea appointment with another story about how they'd snapped victory from the jaws of defeat.

But by the third day, she knew she had to act.

She and Saheeli addressed the consulate—but how could they convey the severity of what they knew? After Ghirapur had won its own freedom and safety? Addressing this threat would stoke fear within the populace, and how could they be certain it was coming? The House of Knowledge had no records of any Phyrexians. Yet Saheeli and Pia were not raving madwomen, a fact the consulate knew well. If Pia allocated the resources to fight, then fight they would.

Even if some of them had no heart in it.

On the fourth day the sky darkened to a deep, rusty red.

For the past three days Saheeli'd been working on something she called "Operation Golden Scales," something she said would keep the streets safe. Most citizens in Ghirapur had been evacuated, leaving only essential personnel behind. Skyships armed themselves with powerful experimental weaponry. Ghirapur's workshops and factories had never worked so hard in such a short time—but it was for the best.

After all, if the enemy breached the aetherflux reservoir, there would no longer be a Ghirapur to defend. So the artisans hadn't slept, and Pia hadn't either. She'd fallen asleep in the entryway of her own home. Getting to bed was just too much effort.

When at last the portals overhead opened, when the great spines of invasion descended from the holes they tore in reality, when the aether around them began to crackle dangerously against her skin—all of this was like letting out a breath.

It was here.

They were here.

The time for preparation was long behind them. All they could do was hope it had been enough.

Ghirapur's streets are clear—or as clear as they're ever going to get—as Pia leaves her home. Three buildings away, a pod obliterates a building's facade. Shattered glass, distant screams, weapons firing—the sounds are close to and yet altogether different from the sounds of revolution. There is no chanting here, there are no throaty slogans, no proud horns or resounding drums.

Only fear and desperation.

Skyships overhead fire their cannons at the invading branches and explosions paint the red sky gold. Shards of porcelain rain down upon the streets. She seeks cover beneath a statue's outstretched arms only to watch as the shards rend furrows down its sides.

Pia looks back up at the sky—at the ship that so readily advanced against the questing branch. She met its captain two days ago. He swore that he'd do everything in his power to keep Ghirapur safe. A thousand and a half flights, he'd said, with no major losses to speak of.

She watches as the branch wraps around the ship, watches as its windows shatter as easily as those down the street, watches the oil slick its surface.

Pia closes her eyes. Her chest aches. A thousand thoughts fight to slip into her mind, but she walls them away. There's a rendezvous with Saheeli to get to.

Speaking of—looks like her operation's off to a good start. Deployment chambers spring up from hatches all along the street, and from those chambers emerge the fruits of Operation Golden Scales. Saheeli must have taken inspiration from some fantastic kind of lizard: the one lumbering in front of Pia is as big as the house that crumbled moments ago. The shining teeth along its jaws are each the size of Pia's forearm. When it stomps its feet, the stones beneath crack. And it is only one of many—all along the streets other bronze attack lizards spring up from the earth. Some are the size of small dogs, some take to the skies like thopters, but all roar their defiance at the coming Phyrexians.

And there are Phyrexians to deal with, even if the sight of these things is almost enough to distract Pia. From the broken house pour dozens of spindly porcelain soldiers—some of whom carry cages as big as they are.

The two forces are about to clash.

Pia doesn't want to be in the middle of it. She ducks under the bronze lizard's feet in time for a familiar face to pop up behind the Phyrexians. A cloud of thopters fly from Saheeli's cruiser. While the lizards descend upon the soldiers, the thopters conceal Pia's escape.

"Get in!" Saheeli shouts. And she's right to hurry—the soldiers don't take their duties lightly. Within minutes they've swarmed the largest of the lizards and taken it down. Oil seeps from its split mouths. It won't be long before the lizard rises against them, too.

Pia hops into the car. Saheeli's foot must be as leaden as the metal she's so fond of; the two of them jerk backward against the seats as the speed catches up to them. Wind whistles in Pia's ears—but they have to talk. "The flagship's down."

“I know,” Saheeli answers. An explosion to their right sends them swerving; Saheeli only barely manages to keep them from flipping. “The smaller ships are doing what they can. The tendrils can’t grasp them quickly enough to stop them. Of course, their firepower is lacking in comparison “

Pia ducks as Saheeli takes them between the legs of a massive Phyrexianized lizard construct. Metal scrapes against metal; the cruiser’s sides dent and distort despite Saheeli’s best efforts. Oil drips onto the trunk’s lid. Pia tries not to wonder how long it’ll be before the cruiser is corrupted, too.

“Do you know what the situation is at the aetherflux reservoir?” Pia asks.

“We think the Phyrexians might understand its importance, or else feel a pull toward the aether stored there,” Saheeli answers. “If you’ll notice, they’re all heading straight for it.”



Art by: Leon Tukker

They turn a corner, and Pia sees the guards.

Her stomach wrenches at the sight. Like a sinister parody of Saheeli’s design aesthetics, they are filigreed in white porcelain, half-metal and half-flesh. One of the men sports a large hole in the center of his head, one that Pia can see clear through. Only his ears, scalp, and chin remain. It looks as if he is a needle meant to be threaded—and the razor his arms have become only affirms the notion. Despite this hideous alteration, his chest rises and falls with unseen breath. His head, such as it is, is turned toward the reservoir.

Pia covers her mouth.

“We can’t do anything to save them,” Saheeli says.

“There has to be something.”

“There might be, but whatever it is will take study, experimentation, iteration. Once the city’s secure we can *consider* what shapes that might take—but not now.”

Pia presses her eyes shut as the cruiser shoots over the newly converted Phyrexians. There are more of them to see when she opens her eyes again. Has she been ignoring them before now? There are so many, in so many different forms: Some share the same porcelain plating motif as the tendrils over-

head, some have their organs replaced with glowing orange flame. She sees a street dog that has grown quills and tendrils twice its size. It'd be comical if the plane wasn't falling apart around her.

"Have you heard from the others?" she asks, before she can stop herself.

Saheeli's eyes don't leave the reservoir far ahead of them. "I have. The last time they saw Chandra, she was all right."

Pia's been around politicians long enough to know when she isn't getting the whole story. "And when was that?"

"Recently, very recently," Saheeli answers. She looks over her shoulder. "This might not be the best time."

"There isn't a good time when it comes to bad news."

"There are *better* times than this."

Pia frowns. "Please, just tell me what's going on."

Saheeli glances around. "She's—"

"Renegade Prime! Long time no see!"

Pia turns. Along with the spritely voice comes the rumble of an engine. Hanging over the side of a skimmer above them is one of her old renegade contacts, Baji. "Need any help down there?"

"We can use all the help we can get," she says. "We're headed to the reservoir."

"Come on in, then!" calls the pilot. "You'll get there faster in this. And we've got better firepower, too."

Saheeli looks up. "He's not joking. Those weapons aren't legal."

The renegades were always great at securing contraband. Pia stands in the passenger seat of the cruiser, one hand on the seat and the other on the door. Saheeli doesn't slow down—not even when Pia offers her a hand.

"There's only room for one more in that skimmer," Saheeli says.

When one of the geniuses of Kaladesh tells you what she wants to do, it behooves you to listen. Besides, when it comes to revolutions and crises, you must be able to improvise. "Right," Pia says. "We'll cover you."

As Baji swoops lower, he reaches out for Pia. The skimmer's not the most solid thing in the world, not by a long shot. Now that they're in it she wonders how it's flying at all—nuts and bolts rattle around them, and the seat's little more than a strip of leather on hard, hastily shaped metal. The back seat's so narrow that the sides bite against her shoulders.

Baji angles the craft up, climbing higher, Ghirapur vanishing below the clouds as they rise into the sky. He flips a switch on his console and a glass dome slides over the open cockpit. "Helmet's under your seat," Baji says. Pia pulls the helmet on. She can't help but notice the chips and scraps on the cockpit glass. "Is this thing secure?" she asks.

"It'll hold," Baji said. "I put it together myself. Used only the finest scrap, straight from—"

Whatever he meant to say is lost in a gurgle when a javelin punches through the window and impales him through the chest to his seat, blood-soaked tip stopping only a hairsbreadth from Pia. Swooping through the air above them is something that might once have been a bird. Now it fights for Phyrexia. Realization sets in—that's no javelin, it's a *quill*. Alarms howl, drowned out by the air screaming in

through the hole in the ship's cockpit. Slowly, it begins to tip to the side, and then twist nose first, plummeting toward the ground. Pia's stomach lurches at the shift in momentum, the nauseating weightlessness. Without thinking she squeezes into the pilot's seat, wedging the quill free from the leather. Baji's body has her half-pinned. There's no room to navigate, the console's an incomprehensible hodgepodge of welded together parts, there are two Phyrexian birds on her flanks and more ships all around.

This isn't good.

And that's before factoring in that Pia Nalaar has never even flown one of these things before.

But she isn't about to give up here. Not when it comes to keeping Kaladesh safe, and not when it comes to her daughter.

Chandra's going to come to tea next month.

Pia's going to be there to meet her.

If she can just get through this.

From the second Atraxa arrived, New Capenna drew its nails down her pristine carapace. A city built reaching ever upward, the atmosphere crackling with a disgusting energy, crawling with a horribly diversity of life. Everything about it is anathema to her—to Phyrexia.

How fortunate that her orders are to scour it.

But Phyrexia is not a beast that eats without thought. In all things there is the seed of greatness, no matter how base the material. To be Phyrexian is to allow yourself to grow, to change, to become something greater than you once were. The spire that so vexes her can be stripped of its accoutrements and rendered anew.

This is a place teeming with sin and filth, and Atraxa will be its savior.

The work alone is enough to fill her with ecstasy. All along the rooftops the organics take up arms. Their weapons will not serve them here: there are no dents in Phyrexia's armor. Nor will climbing higher save them. A single thought from Atraxa summons swarms of flying servitors. Tiny though they may be, they are hungry beasts—soon, those that climb are nothing more than bones falling to the earth. Those that take to the streets instead rely on their muscle and sinew to fight back. They are ignorant to the weaknesses of flesh. The war engines crash through storefront after storefront to fulfill their will. As they reach the street, they unleash clouds of caustic gas. Flesh melts from bone.

Harvest them. One glorious thought, echoed in a thousand minds. They take no prisoners here on New Capenna; there are no cages for the fleshlings. What the engines cannot melt with their gasses is shoveled back inside of them by servitors. Only these parts will remain.

Harvest. Them. How loudly the words ring in her mind! The organics try to fool the Phyrexians, disappearing into the dark and reappearing behind them, but it is no use. Nothing is going to prevent what is to come. Neither will the spells hurled in desperation, or the blades driven between the ribs of centurions. Phyrexia can never be defeated.

But flesh flesh will always yield, in the end.

Norn's orders were clear: everything that draws wretched breath on this plane must be harvested for parts—and so they will be. But Atraxa sees a use for them before tearing them asunder.

After all, somewhere within this monstrosity of a plane are the remains of her predecessors. Finding them is part of her assignment here.

The minds of the newcomers open readily to her. Maestros, they call themselves. The thrill of their new bodies ripples through the entirety of the invading force, lending them strength against those who foolishly resist. Yet this is not the answer she seeks, not the answer Phyrexia needs. Deeper into their minds she ventures.

Within them, Atraxa finds something curious.

Beautiful.



Art by: Chris Seaman

Over and over, that word. That idea. It never comes alone—always with images or sounds or tastes. Paint on canvas. Stone shaped by a studious hand. Flowers opening in the night. A keening creak from a wooden instrument. These things, she surmises, must be *beautiful*, and what is *beautiful* must be important. Often it is the first thought they have when they look at their new forms, the first word that pops into their minds.

But what is that? Why are they so preoccupied with it? The strength of their conviction's spread through the invading forces, each mind amplifying the last. The word rings within Atraxa's skull until she can no longer escape it.

Norn warned her about this. She said there was something about this place that would try to infect her, something that her previous life might lend her resistance against. There are distant memories in her mind of *beauty*, of a pale imitation of compleation she once reveled in. This is the face and name of her enemy—and those who spent so long worshipping this false divinity must know where it lives.

Searching their minds provides another answer: *museum*.

The images that come along are clear enough. Surveying the city, she sees it not far from one of the conversion pods: a squat building festooned in marble shaped this way and that. She looks at it and wonders if it is *beautiful*. Those who were once Maestros tell her that it is. The columns, the statues,

the carefully curated ivy crawling upon its facade: how could she ever think it was anything but *beautiful*?

The furor of their passion drives her on. Whatever it is they are hiding, she must be able to get a better idea of it there. As Phyrexia tears through the resistance, Atraxa lands upon the steps outside of the building. The doors are too small for her; with a touch, she corrects their already apparent failures. This place, too, shall embrace Phyrexia.

Inside there are more incomprehensible works. Fleishy beings stare back from canvases or panels of wood—a testament to the frailty of natural materials. So great is the arrogance of these creatures that they have shaped stone and metal in their image. The wretched inversion rankles Atraxa. All of this does. Why would anyone bother with any of this? These “paintings” often portrayed only a single individual; even those with groups did not portray more than a dozen. Why extol the virtues of so few when it is by many hands that great work is done? And these statues! Even more individual than the paintings!

Her spear makes short work of them. The newly formed scream in the recesses of the Phyrexian mind, but only for a moment; that part of them is dying and understands that this is for the best. All will be one. These works no longer matter.

And yet something deep within that same mind tells her that she must keep going. There is something here. At the very least she can see to the destruction of the heresy around her.

Deeper within there are more atrocities. Worse, if it can be believed. Here the works no longer represent anything at all: they are sharp, geometrical replications of organic creatures. Neither weapons nor bulwarks; she can imagine no purpose for them. These, too, she strikes down, her frustration growing. It is the last room which answers her questions.

Here there are no strange objects, here there is no paint, no mortal loudly announcing their own individual self. Instead, the shapes she sees are pale imitations of glory. A lopsided axe upon the wall, a mock war hound carapace upon a plinth, images that occlude the glory of compleation. Norn told her Phyrexians had once been here, but this speaks to the cruelty organics think themselves above.

Beautiful, that word again in her mind, that awful word, but there is nothing *beautiful* about any of this. Do these people worship failure? Do they look upon the bodies of those that came before and marvel at them? The memories of the Maestros are a battering ram: groups gathered around these remains, drinking and eating and chittering with their wet lips and glistening tongues.

“Can you imagine being the guy swinging that thing around?”

“I’ll tell you something, I wish I could hire him to follow me around and just stand there looking intimidating.”

“Say, how much do you think it’s worth . . . ? I’ve got half a mind to buy it myself.”

“C’mon, pal, there’s no way you could afford it.”

Her grip on her spear tightens. Wrong, wrong, wrong. This place, the Phyrexians who were too weak to see their mission through, the fleshlings who mock them. *Beautiful*, that awful word they have for this, cannot mean other than *wrongness*.

Atraxa will strike it down. All of it, everything that bears the name, must be destroyed. To allow it to exist only invites further mockery—and Phyrexia shall not be mocked.

As phyresis creeps over the building's facade, she obliterates everything within it. What purpose it will serve is not for her to decide. What is useful of them will linger and what is not will be stripped away. Tail, claw, spear, and scream: her weapons are unerring and untiring. Scrap and rubble are all that remain when she is done. What inhabitants she encounters are smeared across the rocks. In their last moments, they might imagine that they are beautiful.

But she never wants to hear the word again. If she could scour it from the mind of Phyrexia, she would, but that is a thing only the Mother of Machines may decree.

Still, Elesh Norn appointed her to lead these forces, which means she can strike down beauty here, if she pleases. Atraxa needs only think the order for it to go out. To her satisfaction, as she emerges from the museum, she hears weapons striking stone all around.

The satisfaction does not last long.

Across the courtyard there are angels staring at her—angels with faces of stone.

It is not a conscious thing that happens next—it is not a thought she has, but an instinct. At once she realizes that the stone seraphs of the cathedral are indeed beautiful, and that she hates them more than she has ever hated anything, more than she knew it was possible to hate. The chorus of minds falls away to the resounding note of anger hammering throughout her being. In a blur of white, she strikes the heads from the statues. When they crumble to the ground, she does not stop attacking them but continues bringing her spear down, over and over, again and again, heedless of the hazy energy that emerges from the rock. Though it sears her carapace and her sinews are alight with agony, she cannot bring herself to stop until nothing remains of the heads but a fine dust.

Only then does she stop. Only then does she hear Phyrexia again.

There are fleshlings climbing the tower. What must be done with them?

One voice speaks, and then another: *harvest them, harvest them.*

But this vapor pains us, and we ache.

Phyrexia does not ache. Harvest them.

Atraxa looks up at the headless figures. A deep calm comes over her. Beauty is dead, and she can turn her attentions once more to the front—to the beings on the outside of the tower, and what they might be planning.

She leaves the platform.

But the seraphs remain, watching her go, with their visitor hovering among them in a haze of color.

They, too, speak among themselves.

Why not stop her? asks the visitor.

It is not yet time.

It does not feel like the right answer—but the visitor cannot disprove it.

Have faith. It's almost here, the end. You'll know what to do when we've gotten there.