

Phyrexian Autopsy

By Will McDermott

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The oak door slammed open, nearly shattering the frame as it hit the wall. Not even flinching, Rayne completed an intricate adjustment on the fragile Memory Jar in her hand and then gently set it aside on her worktable before looking up at her visitor, knowing full well who would be standing there.

"I have been attacked...again."

As if this statement was enough explanation, Urza Planeswalker strode into the lab. His normally blond flowing hair and beard were matted against his head with oil, sweat, and blood. A large scar, still oozing, ran from his right eye down across his jaw, through what would have been the jugular vein on a normal man's neck.

Steam and smoke rose from his clothes and body, both of which were charred black in several places. Startled by his appearance, Rayne realized Urza must have been in a tremendous hurry to return, since he hadn't healed his wounds or reformed his clothing.

Across the planeswalker's shoulders was the carcass of his attacker—a jet black Negator, almost completely intact. On one side of Urza, the



Negator's impossibly thin, spiderlike legs dragged on the floor. To the other side, the beast's black arms lay limp, long black needle-thin claws scraping against Urza's calves as he walked. Its massive head, mouth wide open showing row upon row of inch-long teeth, bounced upside-down next to the planeswalker's own head, making Urza seem like some otherworldly two-headed monster. The battle-scarred planeswalker barely noticed the bulk of the creature as he crossed the lab toward Rayne.

"You survived I see," stated the Academy's master artificer.

"Yes." Came the reply. "This one did not explode when subjected to intense heat. Find out why." With that, the tattered planeswalker swung the foul beast up over his head and dropped it onto Rayne's worktable. The Negator's descending carapace sent the Memory Jar skittering over the edge. A small explosion of glass and mana erupted from the floor as the crystal jar shattered. Urza turned to leave.



"Wait just a damn minute, Urza!" came a call from the back of the lab. Barrin, beard and robes flying, marched up to the table behind Rayne. "You can't just burst into my wife's lab, ruin her work, drop your latest kill, and then leave."

"It's alright, husband," replied Rayne, laying a hand on Barrin's arm to calm him. "Urza is a busy man with the weight of the world on his shoulders. I can forgive this minor inconvenience."

"But this is not the first time, nor I dare think will it be the la—" started Barrin, but the constant pressure on his arm and the flash in his

wife's blue eyes brought the master mage's tirade to an abrupt halt. With his wife nodding at him, Barrin took a long, deep breath and allowed the rage to ebb from his body.

Rayne turned back to Urza, who had stopped at Barrin's outburst but was turning to leave once again. Knowing from past experience she would only get one more question answered, Rayne quickly raised her free hand to stop him again. "Where did this attack happen?" she asked.

"The Isle of Avenant, off the coast of Benalia," he replied and headed out the door, slamming it shut behind him.

"Benalia...the Bloodlines...this is more serious than I thought," said Barrin. He glanced over at his wife, who had already put on gloves and was quickly and deftly tying her long, raven black hair into a bun atop her head.

"Well, put on a smock and prepare an autopsy cart, husband. I will need you to assist me. Jeska, fetch my Brass Secretary."

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Rayne, Barrin, Jeska, and the Brass Secretary struggled with the Negator's arms and legs to reposition it flat on its back on top of her worktable. It was then that they noticed the creature's head was facing backwards. Try as she might, Rayne could not turn the head back around. Giving up, she took up a slender blade, cut a circular incision in the Phyrexian monster's shoulder, and inserted a catheter to siphon off the glistening oil the beast used for blood.

"Secretary begin recording," stated Rayne from beside the autopsy table. "Negator autopsy number 63. Probable cause of death: snapped spinal cord. I am draining the oil from the beast. It is strangely colored."

Rayne picked up a glass vial, dipped it into the reservoir that was quickly filling up with the Negator's fluid, and lifted it up to eye level. "The 'blood' from previous Negators was a glistening black, characteristic of

the two main elements – oil and microscopic powerstone. This liquid is almost green, although it still shines with some inner power.”

She dipped her middle finger into the vial and rolled some of the oil between her finger and thumb. “This liquid feels sticky and somewhat gritty, as if some other solid is suspended within the mixture.” She handed the vial to Jeska “Perform a composite analysis on this liquid. From Urza’s comment, it is obviously much less combustible than the ‘blood’ found in the Negators he fought in Keld.”

“Keld!” Barrin huffed. “If it weren’t for that rogue Gatha leaving the Academy and taking Urza’s eugenics experiments with him to Keld, the Phyrexians never would have found out what we are doing here.”

Rayne looked at the golem, still diligently taking notes “Secretary, stop recording.” She then turned back to her excitable husband. “You may be right dear. But unfortunately we learned a great deal about genetics from Gatha’s work and notes; information that has been instrumental in both the Metathran and Bloodlines projects. Urza’s Metathran soldiers, I dare say, are more than able to handle Phyrexian shock troops. The Bloodlines project is slowly nearing completion, and the heir to the legacy is almost within our grasp. As much as I despise his methods, we owe some small part of this to Gatha.”



She checked the level of the fluid in the reservoir before continuing. “I’m not saying I agree with his motives or his morals, but he was a brilliant scientist, if misguided.”

“Yes, but he brought death and destruction down upon the people of Keld,” countered Barrin. “Wave after wave of Negators attacked that nation all because Gatha’s Keldon creations contained Phyrexian genetic material.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not. Yes, the improved Keldons contained Phyrexian material. So do the Metathran. The Phyrexian controlling these attacks may have even traced that information. However, we’ll never know for sure what precipitated the attacks on Keld. How then do you explain the attacks on Yavimaya?”

“Our duty is to use the information gained during these battles to prepare for the future war. We must learn all we can about Negator physiology and tactics from these attacks or those Keldons will have died in vain. Ah, the oil has finished draining. Let’s continue”



Rayne removed the catheter and began to inspect the beast more closely. “Secretary, record. This Negator is similar in many respects to those that have attacked Urza before as well as the legions that descended upon Yavimaya. It lacks the heavier hide/armor and bulky muscle/gear groups that appeared around the joints in Negators destroyed during the Keldon skirmishes. Thus, this one was more susceptible to physical violence.”

“That would explain the broken neck,” agreed Barrin. “Notice also the beast’s flesh is burned away on both the chest and thigh, leaving only

a metal mesh. Urza obviously tried a heat ray on it first before closing for melee.”

“That’s not all he tried,” said Rayne. “Look at this” She pointed to a strange protrusion on the underside of the Negator’s left forearm. “There is some new structure embedded in this beast’s left arm.” She quickly checked the other arm. “Actually, there seems to be one embedded in both arms. The protrusion on the left shows signs of scarring. However, from the pattern, I would say those marks are radiating out from within the protrusion. What in the nine spheres is this? ”

Rayne picked up a serrated knife from the tray and began cutting and digging around the protrusion. "There is definitely a mass underneath the skin." She peeled back the Negator's skin, which was like woven metal fabric bonded to living leather, and exposed the object under the skin.

"The marks definitely radiate out from here. And the skin/armor here more heavily shielded around the object. In fact there seems to be shielding all around the mass. The mass itself looks like a dull gray, metal honeycomb. It is definitely not manufactured, though. There are no seams. It's as if it was grown, but the combs are perfect hexagons."

Pulling the honeycomb out of the Negator's arm, she showed it to Barrin and then lifted it up to take a closer look herself. "The chambers seem to be filled with a glutinous, amber-colored substance. Strangely, the substance in the chambers nearest the edge is a somewhat lighter color, almost white. I also detect a slight vibration from the honeycomb, much like the thrum of a powerstone. Could this be a secondary power source for the negators? If so, why shield the beast's body from it?"

She looked up at Barrin, who had been silent since seeing the honeycombed object. His face was ashen and he motioned for Rayne to set the object down. He spoke slowly, almost as if he had to force each word out after the last. "I...have...seen...that...before," he said.

"Where? Where have you seen an object like this before?" asked Rayne as



she deposited the honeycomb mass into a specimen jar. "You never mentioned anything like this to me."

"I never expected to see its like again," said Barrin, taking a seat beside the table. "We were in Serra's realm, fighting Radiant and her purification troops; trying to save the refugees. I've told you her forces used these torches that could suck white mana out of a body. We didn't know where all the mana was going, but these

torches were draining the energy out of the Realm, making it shrink into nothingness,”

Rayne stripped off her work gloves and laid her hands on Barrin’s shoulders. “I remember. It was a horrible battle. But there was nothing else you could do. She was insane.”

“What I never told you...never told anyone...was what I saw right before the end. Radiant’s advisor – Gorig, I think – came at me out of the sky. But he wasn’t human. He came at me and his chest opened up. Inside were twelve soul stealers, like Radiant’s torches but with brilliant white cores; cores composed of hundreds, perhaps thousands of chambers...honeycombed chambers.

“We suspected he was a Phyrexian agent; that he had preyed on Radiant’s zealousness for his own agenda. But we never knew what that agenda was until I saw the heart of the demon. He was siphoning off the white mana from Serra’s realm, just as you siphoned the oil out of this beast. Those chambers within Gorig were white mana sponges, sucking up all the mana from the torches; all the white mana from Serra’s realm.”

“Could these be used like white mana shields, diverting the mana from a spell into the chambers?” asked Rayne.

“Yes. But they could be even more. The Negators might be able to actually drain white mana from the land or a person. That’s why the honeycomb, or sponge, or whatever you want to call it is so well shielded: to protect the Negator from the white mana being stored within itself, which is like poison to a Phyrexian.”

Barrin bolted from the chair, nearly knocking it over. “Oh, my lords!” he cried. “This Negator wasn’t after Urza. It was specifically designed to



battle white mana beings and sorcerers. Continue your work my darling. I must warn Urza. The Negators plan to move against Benalia next." With that, Barrin stormed out of the lab, slamming the door nearly as hard as the planeswalker had earlier.

Rayne glanced back at the Negator and the Brass Secretary standing behind it. She picked up her gloves and set back to work.

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By the time Barrin returned, Rayne had already removed the other mana sponge as well as most of the armaments on the Negator's appendages and the various organs and systems within its chest cavity. These were all neatly lined up in Jars on the specimen table. Rayne was currently examining the Negator's main weapon – an eighteen-inch long metallic cylinder roughly three inches in diameter, which had been attached opposite the mana sponge on the beast's right arm.



"Inside the cylinder, I see row upon row of what I can only describe as hair follicles. This is consistent with the defoliant sprayer we found attached to the Negators that attacked Yavimaya. We surmised that these follicles acted as accelerators to propel the liquid out of the cylinder."

Rayne prodded at a strange object attached to the front of the barrel. It appeared to be a tuning fork extending up through the barrel with a thin sinewy cord attached to the bottom. "What I cannot fathom is the purpose of this extension at the front of the barrel. The rear of the cylinder was connected to the arm by a skin-covered,

metallic mesh tube that lead to the organ within the beast's chest cavity that produces the liquid. However, the cord trailing from this forked object disappears within the Negator's arm and is too small to track to its source. Once I have Jeska's analysis of the new liquid, I may be able to fathom how this weapon works."

Rayne looked up from her work to see Barrin. "Secretary, stop recording. Did you locate Urza?"

"No. He's already left the Academy grounds. I sent word out for him to return as soon as he can. What more have you found?"

Barrin and Rayne turned back to the Negator. Rayne had cut open its right arm and chest cavity to expose the membranous tube and the liquid producing organ that powered the monster's weapon. "This organ and the liquid inside are markedly different from those we found in Yavimaya. I sent a sample out with Jeska for analysis. Also, her analysis of the oil turned up something interesting."

"Oh?"

"Yes. The new substance within the Negator's 'blood' bears a striking resemblance to the sap from a particular tree in Yavimaya. A sap the forest developed as part of its forced evolution program. It's a sap that naturally inhibits the spread of fire within the trees."

"How in Dominaria did that substance end up inside a Negator's bloodstream?" asked Barrin.

"I have a theory about that," said Rayne as she doffed her gloves again and lead Barrin to a couple of chairs. "Think about it. What has Yavimaya been doing for the past four hundred years?"

"Evolving to defeat the Phyrexian threat," stated Barrin. "And it's done a great job. With all the modifications the forest has been able to grow into itself, and with Rofellos there to teach the Yavimayan elves everything that the Llanowar elves know about combat, the forest defeated legions of Negators."

"Yes. Yavimaya's long-term plans succeeded where Gatha's shortcuts failed," replied Rayne.



“So, you’re saying the Negators have a long-term plan?” asked Barrin. “Something other than just killing Urza?”

“But it’s more than that. Just like in Yavimaya, Keld, and here on Tolaria, there must be one being, one consciousness directing both the Negator’s attacks and their evolution. Urza once said that at the beginning of the recent attacks, he was facing Negator designs that hadn’t changed in millennia. They were virtually identical to those that attacked him and Xantcha after his failed assault on Phyrexia.”

“But the more recent Negators have been modified to better withstand Urza’s offenses and exploit his weaknesses,” replied Barrin. “You remember the sonic blast that was designed to disrupt Urza’s energy pattern? That almost killed him!”



“Somebody must be directing their evolution, learning from each attack,” stated Rayne. “Look at the extra armor that was added during the Keldon attacks and the defoliant used in Yavimaya. Small bands of Negators attacked those areas before each major offensive. I think those Negators, like this one, were scouts, sent to gather information for future modifications.”

“Those scouts must have been taking samples of the various regions that Urza has been working in,” theorized Barrin. “Yavimaya’s accelerated evolution basically sparked Urza’s ideas for the Bloodlines project, while Gatha’s eugenics

experiments were a vile extension of the Metathran project. How are they collecting so much information? I thought these were just killing machines.”

Barrin’s comment sparked a gleam in Rayne’s blue eyes. “Let me show you what I have found.” She took Barrin over to the specimen table and picked up a large black cube that had numerous lengths of sinewy cord, similar to the one attached to the fork on the weapon, emerging from all sides.

"I've seen these before and always thought they were part of the weapons systems because these cords disappear into the appendages where the weapons are attached. I had never been able to open one up though. This material resists my strongest blades."

As she spoke, Rayne turned the cube over and over in her hands, the sinewy tendrils floating around it in a bizarre dance. "This cube, however, had a perfectly straight seam running along one edge."

"How?" asked Barrin.

"I don't know. Perhaps when Urza snapped the creature's neck, that either broke the seal or triggered the box to open. What's important is what I found inside. I think you will find it quite interesting"

Rayne set the cube back down on the table and lifted up on the sides, leaving the base behind.

Within was what appeared to be a spiderweb emanating from a large, oblong mass that almost seemed suspended above the base.

"These tendrils coming out from the center actually support this mass within the cube. They are strong, yet flexible, like a perfectly straight spring. However, they do more than just support the mass. Look inside the top of the box. See those circular metal plates?"

Barrin picked up the empty, five-sided cube and peered inside. "Yes. I see them. What are they?"

"Each one of those plates corresponds to one of the sinewy cords on the outside and to one of those tendrils on the inside," replied Rayne. These tendrils and those cords must transmit energy pulses to this mass."

"Is this the beast's brain?" asked Barrin.



“Let me show you what’s inside the mass,” replied Rayne. She bent over the table, inserted a thin knife into a small depression in the mass, and stepped back as it sprang open. Inside were two five inch long metallic spindles supported on either side by what looked like tendons. Around one of the spindles was a thick coil of paper-thin metal. The metal stretched across the small span between the spindles and coiled around the other spindle. The metallic paper was covered in symbols.

“It’s a scroll!” exclaimed Barrin. “A metallic scroll.” As he said that, the spindles rotated slightly, moving the metal sheet from one spindle to the other while more symbols appeared. “Is it still recording?”

“Yes,” replied Rayne. “I can’t decipher the text, but it appears to be derivative of ancient Thran.”



“How – ?” began Barrin.

“I have not yet determined how the information prints itself onto the scroll, but this device is not dissimilar to our own Brass Secretary here.” As she spoke, the Phyrexian scroll continued to record.

“Could you close that thing please?” asked Barrin. Rayne snapped the mass shut and placed the cube back over the top of it. “My gods, how long have they been gathering intelligence on us?”

“Too long,” replied Rayne. “I have tried to trace these cords to see where they terminate, but like

the cord coming off the weapon, they are just too small. However, I did find one other troubling item during my search. Take a look at this.”

Rayne held up the dead Negator’s left hand, taking care not to cut herself on its razor sharp claws. Holding the wrist in one hand, she grasped one of the fingers near the tip with her other hand and pulled it backward.

The finger tip snapped open as if on a hinge, and a needle sprang out. Behind the needle was a clear cylinder, a reservoir filled with a red liquid.

“Is that what I think it is?” asked Barrin, who seemed on the verge of hyperventilating.

“It is,” said Rayne. “It’s a blood specimen. The Negator must have drawn some blood from one of its victims before it met up with Urza. I sent a sample to Jeska for analysis.

From behind them, Rayne and Barrin heard Jeska clear her throat. “I have the results on those last two samples, Rayne.” She handed the reports to the master artificer. “The weapon liquid is similar to the oil in the beast’s blood, but without the sap additive. It is highly combustible. However there is another element present that makes the liquid stick to just about any surface. You can’t even wash it off. This is a highly dangerous liquid that—”

“Oh my gods, no!” cried Rayne as she handed one of the reports to her husband. “Look at this, Barrin. It is the report on the blood sample. Do you recognize that genetic sample?”

Barrin studied the sheet for a moment and then dropped his forehead into his hand. “I must tell Urza...now!”

As if answering his pleas, the lab door burst open again. Urza Planeswalker entered the room, commanding everyone’s attention. His earlier wounds were gone, and his clothes were clean. “Negators are attacking the Serran Refugees in Benalia,” he declared. “We must send reinforcements.”

“That’s not their only target,” Barrin replied.

“This negator had taken a blood sample before you destroyed it. The blood belongs to a Capashan family. They are targeting the Bloodlines program.”

