

A Time for Remembrance

By Will McDermott

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Barrin flinched as Urza appeared in front of him. In all his years of service, Barrin never got used to these abrupt entrances. "The Legacy has been recovered." stated the planeswalker. "The plan proceeds apace."

What of the crew?" Was anyone hurt?" asked Barrin, barely concealing his concern for his daughter's safety.

"Hmm? Oh, the crew. Gerrard and Karn made it through the portal. Sisay, too." Urza began leafing through a book on Barrin's desk and did

not see the look of horror on the old mage's face.

"And my...daughter?" Barrin stammered. "Is she...?"

"Interesting." murmured Urza, staring at the tome. "I'm sorry. Yes. Hanna. She's fine. Hearty girl. Takes good care of the ship. You should be proud."

Urza departed as quickly and quietly as he arrived, not even glancing at Barrin, now slumped in his chair, his face cradled in his hands, softly weeping.

For a time, Barrin remained in his chair, staring at nothing. Then a look of resolution passed through his eyes. He focused on the books on his desk, sat up, and pulled out a sheet of parchment. He began to write.



Dear Hanna,

I regret the rift that has grown between us. I know I have been distant. I know I rarely explained my decisions or my unwillingness to accept your passion for artifice. How could I make you understand that artifacts are his world, his power. Perhaps it's too late, but let me tell you the whole story – the story of Urza's obsessions – Mishra, the Phyrexians, time travel, the Legacy – and how his relentless pursuit of these obsessions killed people, destroyed worlds, and tore you away from me.



It began simply, with the discovery of a stone—a stone that broke in half and became the Mightstone and the Weakstone. But the release of that power tore the fabric of reality, weakening the barrier between our world and Phyrexia—between Dominaria and the demon, Gix. Gix found a way through that barrier and corrupted Mishra as the two brothers were locked in a war that lasted thirty years, consumed entire nations, and destroyed a lush paradise. This I know from reading Kayla Bin-Kroog's account of *The Antiquities War* and from the few remarks

Urza has made to me about this time.

For thirty years, Urza pursued Mishra, obsessed with winning their personal war. Near the end, the two brothers' armies had stripped all of Terisiare of usable materials. By chance, Harbin, Urza's son, crashed on the beach of Argoth, a lush island paradise. After fixing his ornithopter and returning to Argive, Harbin reported the location of this new treasure trove of materials for the Argvian war machine. Unfortunately, Mishra learned of Argoth as well, and both armies traveled to paradise—to consume it.

The crown of Argoth's trees towered 55 meters above the forest floor, and the thick forest canopy formed a second floor of fused branches. Argoth's elves had built houses and even small cities within this canopy. Beneath the canopy was the home of Argoth's druids, who had built stone monasteries on and in the limestone floor of Argoth. Neither brother seemed to care that Argoth's inhabitants had not invited them and did not want them there. All

that mattered was the battle for superiority. You see, my daughter. Urza's obsession had blinded him to the damage he wrought.

The elves had forged an extraordinary bond with Gaea and her earthly Queen, Titania. A bond that haunted both brothers' troops as the forest came to life in defense of its inhabitants. Titania was the living manifestation of the life force of Argoth's forest. Her power was somehow linked to her domain. She could manifest an avatar out of leaves, branches, and other natural elements. Her control of living things permitted her to cause explosive growth – war machines left sitting overnight were in pieces or stranded in the trees 10 meters above by morning.

In the end, Urza and Mishra met one last time, and realized that Mishra had given himself over to Phyrexia, and decided Mishra must be stopped no matter what the cost. Thus, did Urza unleash the power of the Sylex upon the entire island of Argoth, destroying his brother and most of the remaining inhabitants of Argoth, in an enormous explosion that was felt half a world away. Hanna, Urza's obsession had driven him to destroy a continent and an island paradise. But it did not end there. This was merely a new beginning. Urza somehow gained enormous power and transcended to another plane of existence.

With Mishra dead, Urza fixated upon Phyrexia. A new obsession was born within him. Urza wandered the planes for centuries, searching in vain for a path to Phyrexia where he planned to wreak vengeance on the beings who stole his brother's humanity. From



my discussions with Karn, I believe Urza was truly insane during this time over the grief he felt for his brother's death. You see, Karn does not now realize that Urza created him centuries ago or that his memory begins long before he was ever called Karn.

Finally, Urza met Xantcha, a Phyrexian "sleeper" agent created out of flesh and metal, and saved her from a grisly death. Fortunately for Urza, Xantcha was deemed imperfect by the Phyrexians and marked for execution. Xantcha, it seemed, had become too human. Xantcha looked like a human girl, but she had witnessed evil more profound than any human girl could endure and hope to survive. Phyrexia even corrupted a fragment of her life force and locked it in amber to insure her loyalty. To recover her "heart," as she called it, was her greatest desire.



In return for saving her life, Xantcha taught Urza about Phyrexia and the sleeper agents Gix created – the same Gix who Urza now believed had altered his brother. Urza blamed Gix for Mishra's bedevilment, because the Brotherhood of Gix held considerable sway over his brother in later years of the war. Gix is a demonic construct of Yawgmoth, built of bone and artifice connected together by soft sinewy meat and tendons of unknown origin, and somehow imbued with sentience. In Gix, this sentience is twisted, cruel, bloodthirsty, and power-hungry.

Eventually, Xantcha took Urza to Phyrexia. Urza has told me little about his trip to Phyrexia; only that it nearly cost him his life,

alerted that foul plane's denizens of his existence, and marked him for their vengeance. But I have pieced some information together from Karn's "memories." Phyrexia consists of a series of Spheres. The First Sphere is only distinguishable from primitive portions of Dominaria by the metallic sheen of the plants and the dullness of the water. The clouds are a sooty gray but shimmer from the metal suspended within.

The Second Sphere is much harsher. The air carries a strong acid taste. The ceiling is a twisted morass of metallic beams and arches, and the ground consists of metal shards. The Third Sphere is nothing but a labyrinth of pipes that intersect and split, distributing their contents throughout the other Spheres.

The fourth sphere is where Urza's aborted attack ended. A fine mist of thick, glistening oil rains down from pipes in the sky, covering the surface, which is littered with the gutted remains of unknown structures. Mounds of ash and grit dot the oily surface. The only light emanates from mile-high furnaces scattered over the landscape.

Even with Xantcha's warnings and all his preparations, Urza was no match for the ferocity of the Phyrexians or the corruption of their plane upon his body. Xantcha did retrieve her heart during the raid, but Urza left much of his will behind. They were alive, but on the run.



Urza and Xantcha blindly fled to Serra's Realm, created by the brilliant planeswalker herself. It was a literal wonder—endless golden sky broken only by a single palace created out of crystal, marble, and opal. The palace floated among plains in a golden



twilight, drifting through the sky as light as clouds across the heavens. Angels and humans lived together in Serra's Realm, dedicated to the arts, theory, philosophy, and chivalrous warfare.

Urza and Xantcha had no time to revel in the wonder of Serra's realm, for they were sick and injured from their battles with the Phyrexians. Serra placed Urza in her Sanctum, which focused the white mana of the realm, creating an immensely powerful

healing light. While Urza healed, Xantcha—a being of black mana—was deserted on the plains, where the humans who lived in Serra's realm resided.

While healing, Urza later told me he looked deep into the fabric of Serra's realm and saw flaws. Wondrous though it was, Urza now believed that no artificial plane could last indefinitely because no being can create perfection; only nature can perform that miracle. Serra's realm and Phyrexia were flawed and those flaws would eventually bring about their destruction. Urza realized Gix wanted Dominaria because his own plane was doomed, and that the sleeper agents were being used to infiltrate Dominaria.

His body healed, Urza left Serra's realm to prepare for the Phyrexian invasion. Unfortunately, death and devastation followed

Urza once again. By brazenly entering Phyrexia – so sure of his power to destroy that plane – Urza merely created a trail of strife. Shortly after he left, Gix’s minions, following Urza’s trail, appeared in Serra’s Realm, and rained their fury down upon its inhabitants. Saddened over the Phyrexian taint on her angelic realm, Serra left shortly after the Phyrexians were driven out.

While Serra had healed his body, old wounds still festered in Urza’s Soul – guilt he harbored over the Mishra’s death. Xantcha knew Urza needed all his faculties to deal with the Phyrexian threat and sacrificed herself to help Urza finally come to terms with this his pain. With a clear mind and healthy body, Urza began anew his mission to defeat the Phyrexians, using the only resource he had: artifice.

With my help, Urza found this desolate isle, Tolaria, and built a small academy. Tolaria was a forgotten pimple of sun-beaten volcanic rock, a final outpost of land on the edge of a huge sea. Marked on maps as a place to avoid and surrounded by coral reefs, Tolaria had little but isolation to offer. It was perfect for our needs.

Here, as Master Malzra, Urza gathered an inner circle and trained young mages who never even knew who he was. This first academy was built for one purpose only—to control the fundamental forces of time. Using the students much like workers in one of his power plants, Urza attempted to build a huge machine that could take him into the past. Urza thought the key to defeating



the Phyrexians now lay in talking, first-hand, to the only other race he believed had ever dealt with the Phyrexians – the Thran, who perished or left Dominaria thousands of years ago.



Here, he also built Karn for the express purpose of testing the time machine. Urza needed an artificial creature that could survive the magical stresses generated within the time machine. Using his original Avenger designs, Urza created the shell of Karn. However, improving the golem's intelligence proved impossible. Urza believed Karn needed a personality – sentience. He then struck on an idea – Xantcha's heart! The "heart" still contained a kernel of Xantcha's personality – her ability to think and adapt. Therefore, he connected Xantcha's heart into a cradle inside Karn's head.

Alas, the time machine failed. Unable to travel further than a scant two days into the past, Urza pushed the machine and the academy to the breaking point, producing an explosion that tore loose the fabric of time on the island and killed half the members of the academy. As with Argoth and Serra's realm, Urza left Tolaria greatly changed after the accident. It took ten years before those of us who survived could return. What remained was not so much a place out of time as one suffering from an excess of it. Portions of Tolaria skirted the edges of the flow, stretching minutes into years; other places formed traps where one misstep could cost a person half his allotted years – or even his life.

Tolaria's mountains and valleys were now shrouded in a perpetual mist. Within these mists we began to rebuild the academy, but without Urza...for a time. Urza left Tolaria to search for artifacts left from the time of the Thran. If he could not talk to them he would learn from their relics. His obsessive mind was now following a new course. Once that would change my life forever. With the help of Jhoira, one of the academy students, Urza found a huge Thran mana rig perched on a Shivan caldera.

Divided into two large shielded bells connected by a long production and storage facility, the mana rig housed a gargantuan Thran forge. Huge tubes, large enough to hide an army, snaked down the black volcanic hill, feeding the forges from the fires of the caldera lake. Urza decided to use the forge to mass produce Thran metal for his war against the Phyrexians. He also sensed a greater purpose to the rig.

Unfortunately for Urza, the mana rig was populated by a community of Viashino that had been stranded by the Ice Age in the mountain regions of Shiv. However, they had developed into excellent metalsmiths and builders, not only using the Thran facility, but almost assuredly saving it from the ravages of both time and intruders. Never one to pass up a valuable resource, Urza decided to use the Viashino to forge the Thran metal for him while he learned everything he could about the facility.

However, the Viashino are a strong-willed and proud race. Thus, Urza was forced to make a deal with Fire Eye, the viashino "bey"



who led the creatures living and working in the mana rig. The “bey” is not a king – they are much more a community than a hierarchical society – but Fire Eye had the respect of the tribe that had made him their leader.

Urza promised to help protect the viashino from dragon attacks and, in return, Fire Eye promised that the viashino would help Urza run the Mana Rig and learn its secrets. What Urza learned made him believe he finally had a chance to defeat the Phyrexians. With the rig, he could create another powerstone like the one he and Mishra had found so long ago. In addition, with the Thran metal the Viashino could produce in the forge, Urza could create a way to transport the stone...a flying ship.

Thus, a new plan formed in Urza’s mind; a plan that would become another in a long line of obsessions for the enigmatic, but detached planeswalker; a plan that would take centuries to bring to bring to its fruition....

“Its fruition.” said Barrin. “But it isn’t over yet, is it?” Barrin stared at the letter and knew he could never finish it; could never deliver it. To give so much away before the end could be disastrous to the plan and dangerous for the crew and his only daughter. By then, he realized, it might be too late. Slowly, with the deliberation of a man who had lived in seclusion for centuries, Barrin collected the letter in his hands and began feeding the sheets, one by one, into the fireplace.

