

**Clockmaker's Requiem
by Barth Anderson**

Krina nudged her clock, and it crept up her long neck, closer to her ear, tiny claws tickling. "Left. Left again," it whispered. "Forward."

Behind Krina walked the confidante, a spider-limbed girl with lip rings to seal her mouth. She kept close to Krina, whose inventions always found the right way, no matter how the ziggurat changed, and the skirts of their cloaks stirred swirls of the maroon dust that seemed to gasp from the mortar and paving stones.

"The salon is located up there this afternoon," the clock whispered to Krina. "Up the Ascent."

Today the Avenue of Ascent was a vast flight of stairs beneath a sky of ceiling windows, and a regiment of urbanishment troops inclined upon the steps in a cove of sunlight, their stiff shirt collars sprung open like traps. Up and down the great flight, fruit sellers stacked their wares for climbers to buy, making the Avenue of Ascent a cascade of color. Blood-red loaves. Foreign lemons. Ripe, adorno pears. Pomelos.

Krina stopped and stared at the big orbs of yellow-green pomelos, considering. Instinctively, she touched the small, spiny back of her other clock, a lookout wrapped about her right thumb and the sibling to the one lit upon her neck. The lookout whispered the futures into her ear, when she raised her hand to her shoulder:

"People will all see the same time together, the apprentice will say to you, Krina. A tool, that apprentice will call the thing he's created. Stop him. Don't let him."

The confidante watched Krina staring at the stack of spongy pomelos, light fingertips resting on her lips as if the tight line of locking rings might not be enough to prevent her from cautioning her mistress from buying one.

The fruit-monger caressed the round brow of a pomelo, flicking dust from its green rind. "Fancying a sweet-tart, duchess?" he said from behind his bandana, which was wet and dusty at the mouth. To him, it was simply fruit. He had no idea what the pomelo meant in Krina's caste or he might not have said, "Only half a crona."

Shadows from a dove flock zigzagged up the Ascent, the moment passed, and Krina shook her head. Then she lifted the hem of her cloak and walked up the steps.

The apprentice will be safe, yes? said the confidante in handslang.

"We clockmakers are the engines of the ziggurat," said Krina, turning and climbing the stairs. "I'd save everyone if I did it now with his clocks unmade. Besides, why do you care?"

The confidante took Krina's left hand and pressed handsigns against Krina's palm in a series of pats, the equivalent of whispering to a handslanger. *Assassinating based on whispers from lookouts? Tragic.*

"You needn't scold." Krina snatched her hand back. "I didn't buy any."

Krina led the way, lookout hissing and slithering along her shoulder, and in their deep pockets, the confidante's hands said, *You are an ungrateful, rebellious confidante.*

With heavy, hand-hewn beams of brandy-colored wood overhead,

