

ADRIFT

A Lost Planeswalker Zine

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SIDNEY HINDS

RISE AND FALL

Vaash Vroga walked the beach on a nameless world, following in the wake of its creator.

It was not the first artificial plane she'd tread. Her journeys had taken her through the meditation realm of Nicol Bolas more than once (an oddly high number of times, truth be told, for a place closed off to so many). She had even spent a few painful, fleeting moments staggering through the ruins of old Phyrexia, failing to locate some ancient artifact or another at the behest of her now-discarded mantle, before the vile fumes of the place had overcome her.

This plane had a more convincing veneer of naturality to it, but the sand was just a bit *too* clean and golden, and the air not *quite* as fishy as it ought to be, this close to the sea.

“How much further?”

“Hm?” The creator turned his head back, slackening his pace by half a step. He was dressed in a simple sleeveless tunic of gold-trimmed white, with a cloak of the same colors that left his legs bare from the thigh down. Both garments glowed with an almost imperceptible light.

“How far is our destination?” Vaash gestured ahead.

“Ah.” The creator resumed his pace. “No destination. I thought a walk would be a nice change of pace for you.” He veered a degree to

the right, and started up a low rise overlooking the shore. Tall, dark-green grasses grew in patches that quickly thickened as the beach rolled inland into a meadowed field. “Tis nicer by far to walk in the open air, under the sun, than remain cooped up in some Tolarian dormitory.”

Vaash squinted up at the sky. It was decidedly overcast by now. There were rays of light still peeking through the seams in the clouds, but those were closing rapidly.

“Did you make that?” She asked. “It feels just like natural sunlight.”

“It’s a rescue,” the creator replied, his grin full of teeth. “A treefolk ‘walker pulled that sun into the Eternities about five hundred years ago to deny it as a power source to a rival. I plucked it from there.”

“The Battlemage Ravidel is as resourceful as he is formidable,” Vaash remarked.

“Ravidel’, if you please. We will have a frank, straightforward conversation, unmuddled by titles or deference. After all, we are peers of the multiverse, you and I.”

“No deference here.” Vaash held up her hands and gave a mock bow. “If the mighty Ravidel wishes to call me ‘peer’, I won’t deny him.”

Ravidel snorted. “Very good. You can lose ‘the mighty,’ but good.”

“Surprisingly humble for a centuries-old tyrant.”

“Hm.” Ravidel nodded, not turning back. “I find myself discovering and re-learning humility every century or so.”

The two Planeswalkers hiked a ways longer in silence. The fields were mostly empty, save for fireflies blinking among the blades. The grassy portion of the beach started to slope upward, and soon they were walking along a low ridge, a meadow to their right, and a straight drop of several yards down to the sands on their left. A clutch of children, human and goblin, were on the beach. A few tended to a fire, while others stood in the shallows, fishing. Several caught sight of Ravidel and called out. Ravidel acknowledged them with a wave and a nod.

“Well.” Ravidel paused at a small boulder set at a high rise in the hill, and perched upon it. “What do you think? Not bad for my first plane.”

Vaash regarded sea and sky, keeping her face set.

Ravidel chuckled. “Hard to impress a Planeswalker. Even one of you youngbloods.”

Vaash shrugged. “I’ve seen a lot.”

Ravidel didn’t offer a response to that. His breaths were short, and loud enough to be heard over the breeze. Awkwardly so. Oldwalkers were all like that in some regard. Still uneasy in the trappings of newly mortal bodies, even decades after the Mending had lessened the nature of the spark.

Maybe they just breathe loud because they miss being the center of attention.

“What is it you want out of life?”

Ravidel held a hand in front of his face. Five rings gleamed, one per finger, each inset with a stone. “What does Vaash want for Vaash?” As Ravidel spoke, points of colored light peeled off from the rings and swirled in his open palm.

“Vaash’ has not had much time alone for Vaash. But I am content in the freedom I enjoy as a mage and ‘walker to do as I please.”

“Or as others please that you do?”

Vaash regarded Ravidel. He held her gaze, lights spinning faster and faster in his palm.

“This talk is going to be about Leshrac, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” Vaash rested a hand on her hip. “Why bring me here to lecture me on my tormentor?”

“I am uniquely qualified to do so: I know what it is to be twisted to the ends of another Planeswalker. I know what it is to twist others to my ends. And, of course, I knew the Planeswalker who has most recently twisted you to his ends.”

The colored lights slowed and hovered, and condensed into a figure: a wrinkled, white-haired man, with flame around his brow, and a rippling tunic the color of night.

“Leshrac. A peer of my first master, Faralyn. Along with Tevesh

Szat, they conspired to slay one of their fellow ‘walkers and use the life force to escape their joint imprisonment on Dominaria. Instead, their plotting led to my own death and sparking, and the death of my dearest friend.”

“*He’s* supposed to be dead,” Vaash whispered, eyeing the figure. “Supposed to have died decades ago in the Mending, shoved face-first into a rift.” She shrugged her shoulders again, to reassure herself they were still bare.

Un-mantled.

“Yes,” Ravidel said. “And as I understand, you have your own schemes for him.”

Vaash scowled “I have not spoken of schemes to do with Leshrac. To you or Jodah or Ral.”

“But *you have* spoken about him to Jodah, and he has sense enough to read your intentions between the lines. Vengeance. Plain and simple.”

“Yes, plain and simple.” Vaash walked past Ravidel, moving slightly past him up the slope. “Intentions *so* plain and simple, in fact, that we don’t need to discuss them further.”

“Jodah wishes you to reconsider. *I* wish for you to reconsider.”

Vaash shook her head. “I have a responsibility to my homeland. Urborg has many enemies, and Leshrac is too potent a foe to leave unattended.”

“Urborg is important to you.”

“Urborg is...at the core of what drives me. Freedom for Urborg, and those of Urborg. All the world dismisses us as a sulfurous swamp, yet all the world cannot help but interfere with our sovereignty. I would see an Urborg free of tyrants.”

“Noble and high-minded.” Ravidel nodded. “Were you brought up among freedom fighters, or do you come by these ideals yourself?”

“Hah!” Vaash spat upon the grass. “My ideals are my own. ‘Freedom’ couldn’t have been further from the aims of those who raised me.”

Ravidel nodded. “Your parents?”

“I lost my parents to the Breathstealers when I was six.” Vaash hissed. “Urborg’s infamous death cult. They took me to feed into the meat grinder of their mercenary service.” Vaash paused. Her chest was filling and falling rapidly. She closed her eyes and slowed her lungs, letting the rise and fall become deeper, slower, and then regular again.

“And yet they taught you many lessons,” Ravidel observed, as she opened her eyes again. “Your prowess in death magic demonstrates as much.”

Vaash shrugged. “A lesson can come from anywhere. It does not make the teacher good, even if the lesson is. *Always* there was an ulterior motive with my elders among the Breathstealers. They taught power for no purpose but to farm us out as glorified magical assassins. Breathing exercises, lessons in eating mana, artifacts of power... all given to make us powerful pawns. I was taught that the greatest thing I could aspire to in life was to die, and merge with the great nightstalker” Vaash turned toward the water. “My inclinations to freedom are antithetical to the Breathstealers.”

“That’s where the mantle came from.” There was the faintest hint of a question in Ravidel’s voice.

“Jodah told you of the mantle?”

“A power-storing and consuming garment that bears the mark of Leshrac? Of course he did. I am, as I said, one of the few living authorities on the Walker of the Night.”

“I thought you didn’t care for titles.”

“It sounds like this particular title might be salient, given the mantle’s origins.” Ravidel looked her up and down. “Was he a Breathstealer himself?”

“A few of my teachers among the Breathstealers thought he might be some legend from the cult’s past, perhaps even the Spirit of Night itself. As for me... I was nothing special to them, and the mantle was just a means. A pretty basting on another sacrifice intended to raise another iteration of their night-stalking god.” Vaash’s mouth twisted. “Well, I guess they succeeded in the end, didn’t they?”

Ravidel nodded. “Perhaps the mantle was a contingency. In case

another ‘walker ever succeeded in doing to Leshrac what... well, what happened to him, in the end.”

The image of Leshrac in his palm shuddered, dissolving into points of light that leapt up into the air, and spiraled in a wide ring overhead. The lights twisted around one another, fusing into a broad, tangled, rainbow-hued circle.

“Let me tell you a tale.” The ring blazed with light and the image of a woman emerged, with a warrior’s build and cascading blonde hair. Beside her stood an old man with a walking stick, and a cap upon his head.

“Tev Loneglade was a Planeswalker,” Ravidel began. His voice had a slight echo to it. More vanity. “Old and powerful. Not the friendliest of ‘walkers, but content to keep to himself.

“He had a sister, Tymolin. One precious to him, on whom he expended his magical prowess to protect and keep alive. She was taken from him-”

A flurry of figures swirled around the two—figures in white and black. They surrounded the tall woman, and she fell out of the disk, limp.

“-and slain. So Tev swore vengeance, and became Tevesh. Tevesh Szat.”

The hunched and burly man turned reptilian and blue-scaled. Tentacles blossomed around the ring, and he reached down toward them.

“Szat swore vengeance against his sister’s killers, and then against Dominaria, and eventually, once free of the Shard of Twelve Worlds, against everything and everyone. He sowed ruin across all Dominaria and every other plane he could reach.”

Steaming tears streamed from the burly thing’s red-hot eyes as it tore through figures—black and white at first, then green, blue, and red.

“Tevesh Szat slew my dear friend at the Summit of the Null Moon, to escape the Shard. Tore them away from me just as the Icatians took his sister from him. He did not do this to spite me, but he did it nonetheless, and in doing so spurred me to become a beast not entirely

unlike him. I became a scourge to many, mortal and walker alike, all in the name of revenge-”

The image shifted. A red-haired man was struck dead by Ravidel’s magics. A man in a turban assaulted a minotaur with magics, and was in turn cut down by a golden-haired figure wearing dark glasses. Szat screamed in a dome of glass and metal as electricity cooked his flesh.

“-and all for naught. I accomplished precious little against the ‘walkers who actually manipulated me, other than to hurt the ones who once wished to help me. Tevesh Szat evaded me for centuries, only to die at the hands of some greasy-fingered tinkerer.

“Taysir and I sealed Leshrac away on Phyrexia for a time, but by then... vengeance and hatred had become so core to my being that I was indistinguishable from the walkers I had sworn vengeance upon.”

Ravidel closed his eyes. “So it was that the cycles of vengeance claimed me.”

Vaash snorted. “And let me guess, it all starts with one bad decision.”

Ravidel nodded. “It starts with a compromise. A bending of principals, justified by belief in the good of your ends. Then another compromise, no worse than the first, but justified further because two compromises cannot possibly be that worse than one. Then, eventually, comes a complete break from your principals, and before long, a snowdrift of compromises have buried the ruins of whoever you once were.”

“So what’s the solution?” Vaash spread her hands. “Never compromise? Never take risks?”

“Not at all. Simply do not fool yourself when a compromise comes. When you break with your ideals, acknowledge the break, and reassess yourself. Otherwise you’ll have no idea what you’ve become, and in trying to reconcile the self with the lost ideal, you will lose yourself further. The person you are now, or the person who compromises. You can’t be two people at once.”

“What if I *want* it both ways?” Vaash drew her hand in a line through the space between Ravidel and herself. “Who says I must

choose between the Vaash I am and the Vaash who takes vengeance? Why must it be an inherently corrupting process?"

"*Everything* we do changes us, Vaash Vroga." Ravidel clenched his fist. "One does not pursue a creature like Leshrac, or even the shadow of Leshrac, without risk to oneself and others. Inherently self-altering risk. Did you not compromise yourself significantly in your pursuits for artifacts to feed to Leshrac's mantle?"

Vaash scowled. "It seemed a better path than nourishing it with the breath of orphans."

"And yet look at what you *did* do. Destabilizing Zendikar. Attacking your fellow 'walkers.'"

"Walkers who did not care to understand-"

"And Shiv?" Ravidel's eyes flashed. "Were your actions there the work of the ambitious, high-minded mage who wishes to free the planes of tyranny?"

"That... was a compromise. A bad one."

"A man like Deniz-"

"I know!" Vaash interrupted, hotly. "I know and I regret it! I told myself he was Benalish, they fight against the Cabal too. I saw them as allies, and I thought one intervening on Shiv would be beneficial..."

She tapered off as Ravidel raised an eyebrow.

"It was a compromise," She said, turning back to the sea. A trail of smoke was blowing off the children's fire, swept inland and up the slope below them, where the warm breeze from inland carried it back over the sands and the waves. "There was power to be gained in having an ally who controls the mana rig. Enough perhaps to power the mantle without having to go hunting artifacts on other planes."

"That must have been quite the burden, sating Leshrac's hunger." Ravidel lowered the ringed hand. "Sustaining the mantle."

"It was painful," Vaash whispered, "but I thought it a necessary task, to fight against beasts like the ones who gave the mantle to me."

"It is the cycle." Ravidel said. "The Breathstealers wronged you. The Cabal wrongs your homeland. And in your efforts to right those wrongs, you have spread the cycle of wrongs wider still. The only

solution can be this: Remove yourself from the cycle, and feed it no longer.”

Vaash was silent, regarding Ravidel. His breath was slower now, and steady, though his stomach was rising and falling with each breath.

“Do you like the person you are, Ravidel?”

Ravidel blinked. “I...what?”

“Would you say that you like yourself? As you are now?”

“I am proud of what I am now,” Ravidel said. “Considering my past. He gestured toward the children, who were cooking their catch over the fire. “Where once I ruined lives, now I provide preservation of both. A whole plane, safe and peaceful, for the orphans *I* left in my wake, and for their descendants.”

“Would you be who you are now, if you hadn’t done all those things before? If you hadn’t fallen into the cycle of vengeance? If you had not *learned* all you know now from the mistakes you made?”

Ravidel pursed his lips. “No, I suppose I wouldn’t be. Still, I would excise those years of my life from existence if I could. All those lives lost, people killed... were they worth it for one mage to become a better man?”

Vaash stared at him, and shrugged.

“Yes,” Ravidel said, smiling sadly. “Fair enough.” He smiled at Vaash, though it was strained. “I suppose we live with all versions of ourselves at all times, don’t we?”

Vaash shrugged again.

Ravidel closed his hand. The ring of mana above them collapsed into his fist and was extinguished. Raindrops, minute pinpricks of coolness in the still-warm air, dotted Vaash’s face and arms.

“I’d welcome you to stay here a while,” Ravidel said. “To think over vengeance before you take it. The planes will carry along fine in your absence. Here you can be at peace with the Multiverse. Apart from the cycle.”

“It is not better to leave the cycle behind than to remain,” Vaash snapped. “Power not used for good out in the Multiverse is power that might as well have been snuffed out. All the good Planeswalkers of old

who died... would the outcome for the Multiverse at large not be the same if they had just disappeared to a pocket plane, never to be seen again?"

Vaash took a breath. "Your question before, if your growth was worth the cost of your sins, it's the wrong way of looking at things. Nature does not care about moral equity. *Maybe* you are a better person for your reformation and experiences, but it's all of little benefit to the planes if you stay here, closed off from it."

"Be careful how much you presume the Multiverse needs people like us." Ravidel crossed his arms. "The denizens of the Multiverse endured before we were born, and will do so long after you and I die."

"Yes," Vaash replied, "But I would rather they endure without tyrants than with. With fewer storms and calamities."

"An answer for everything." Ravidel let his hand fall.

"Yes. This is a conversation, isn't it?"

Ravidel opened his mouth as if to respond, but seemed to think better of it. He exhaled instead, still loud and abrupt, and sat back down upon the stone.

"It is that. I forget myself." He shrugged, and gestured towards Vaash. "Please."

"The cycle of wrongs and responses is as natural to human intercourse as the predator-prey system. Even the gods must live within them the best they can." Vaash clenched her fist. "As walkers, don't we have a privileged position? A rare perspective? How is it good to remove ourselves from the cycles when our privilege makes us among the few who can ease the suffering of those within?"

Ravidel stared at her, though by the way he worked his jaw, he did appear to be considering her words.

"I think, perhaps, we are both wrong."

Vaash raised an eyebrow. "Oh? So an old dog can still ponder new concepts?"

"To stay in the cycle and let it buffet us about is beneath a walker. Even if we see the cycles for what they are." Ravidel opened his hand. His rings glowed faintly. "But to abandon it is, as you suggest, a waste

of our potential. We can be proactive in our good as much as in our wickedness.” Ravidel stood, and clapped his hands together. “We cannot leave the cycle, and it makes no difference to simply remain.” He began to pace the grass.

Vaash moved to follow his pacing. “So we guide the cycle.”

“We *influence* it the best we can.” Ravidel pounded a fist into his hand. “Use our knowledge having been tossed about by the Multiverse to determine how to best spin to the ends of peace. Perhaps find an equilibrium where those within the cycles do not just survive, but thrive.”

Vaash nodded. “Remove the worst elements to keep the cycle from spinning out of control. Elements like Leshrac.”

Ravidel stopped in place. The winds were picking up again. “Snuffing Leshrac will be dangerous. There will be risk and a great danger of collateral damage if not handled carefully. It would be completely understandable if you preferred to leave this task to me.”

“Fuck off, old man. *I* am the one allowing *you* to accompany me in this endeavor.”

Ravidel laughed at that. *Really* laughed, a cackle that cut through the growing bluster of the storm. A madman’s laugh, no mistaking it, but Vaash found it oddly comforting.

“I would ask one thing of you, at the outset of our partnership here.”

Vaash raised an eyebrow. “What would that be?”

Ravidel clasped his hands together behind him. “If we do this, once its over... while it’s underway... I want you to think long and hard about who Vaash Vroga is, and what she wants for herself, should she ever allow herself to rest.” He held out a hand. “Agreeable?”

“Tolerable,” Vaash clapped hands with him, and they shook. “I look forward to getting to know both of us.” The air was still warm, but now thicker droplets of cool water were beginning to pepper them, wetting her face and bare forearms.

“Arcades’ Scales, that’s a nice feeling,” Ravidel remarked as their hands unclasped. He had his face upturned to the sky, nostrils flaring.

“You’re breathing wrong.”

Rise and Fall

“Hm?” Ravidel turned to look at Vaash sidelong.

Vaash drew in a long breath, letting her chest swell slowly. She gestured at her breast. “Expand as you inhale-”

She let it out, whistling into the wind. “Draw in as you let your breath go. Let your chest rise and your lungs fill. Your lungs, not your belly.”

Ravidel copied her for several repetitions. “Hm. The benefit being?”

“Oxygen gets into the blood; you’ll live longer, old man.” She smirked at him. “And waste less time with spells of vigor.” She nodded her chin at his emerald ring, which still glinted brighter than the others.”

Ravidel snorted. “Impudent. You’ll make a fine protege.” He breathed in and out again, with a thoughtful grimace. “And is this a technique of...?”

“Just good practice in many cultures, on many planes.” Vaash turned back to the sea, and nodded. “But yes, learned in Urborg.”

“A lesson learned can be put to good use no matter the source,” Ravidel said. “I heard that once, but in my old age, I can’t quite remember where from.”

Vaash snorted. The rain water had soaked her hair by now, and warm trickles of water were pouring down her neck and face. It *did* feel tremendous.

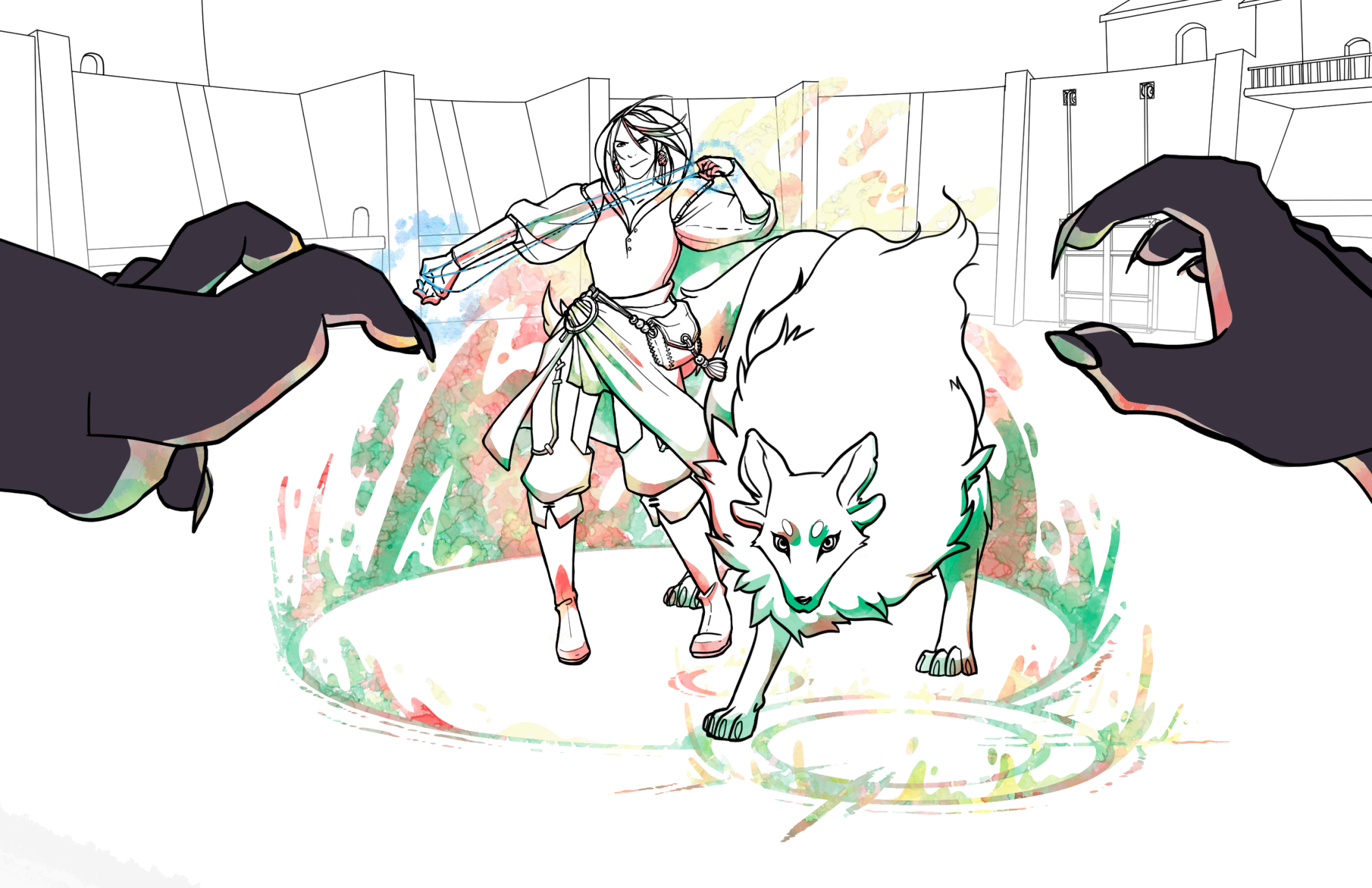
She allowed herself a smile.

A laugh.



MARTINA MONTRASI

DAKKON, LOST LIEUTENANT



PLINK

CHAMPIONS OF VALOR'S REACH
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KILLING TIME

The trouble with immortality was finding things to do. So she had gone mad, and that helped pass the time.

These days she had family to occupy her, so she filled her hours with worry. She worried about her grandson, who she thought was looking skinny. She brought him good things to eat—monks, and priests, and even the occasional virgin—and he always thanked her fulsomely, but he hardly ever partook. She had trapped and stewed an abbot for him, once, which he had professed to enjoy. The key was to cook them low, and slow, braising in their own juices—you had to do it like that, when the meat was old and tough.

He had thanked her for her thoughtfulness when she pulled back the cloche, but he had mostly just moved the abbot around on his plate, while they made small talk about the weather.

He took his nourishment in other ways, she understood that. Still, a growing boy ought to eat.

She kept mementos of his achievements, like any proud grandmother would, although she was running out of cupboard room for the skulls. Still, that was a tractable problem. There were entire wings of the castle she had not explored yet, even after hundreds of years. There would be more than enough wall space to mount any future trophies.

The key to bleaching skulls, she had discovered, was the same as braising an abbot: you had to render them low and slow. Patience was key, but immortality bred patience, and centuries spent trapped in a coffin had left her with a fixity of purpose which she understood, though only vaguely, that others who were not so gifted did not share.

Skulls continued to fascinate her, even after all these years. Each was unique, and each told a story. You could read a lifetime's worth of trauma in just the contour of a cheekbone.

Skulls were better than books, if you knew how to look.

She wondered what her own skull would look like, should the time ever come. She had left instructions for its preparation in a place where she knew they'd be found.

She kept spellbooks and scrapbooks, and lost sleep over missing pages. A thief had taken one, once, and she had sworn to get it back. She asked her grandson about that, from time to time, and he always told her the same thing: "Be patient. I have a plan."

She wondered how he could not notice that patience was all she had.

In the years since the interlopers had gone, she had found new ways to amuse herself. She had muddled up their stories, until even the Death Speakers could not agree what was myth and what was canon. If she could not exact vengeance on their bodies, she would take revenge upon their memories, instead.

And history, unlike the body, was incapable of self-repair.

The one with the angels had left a journal—an apologia of sorts—full of self-pity and sermonizing. She had read it, then wished she had not—the words made painful sounds in her head.

At first, she had meant to burn the book, but in the end she had reused it: rising the ink out, then sketching skulls on the pages. Even for an immortal, there was no sense in wasting good paper.

In the evenings, she tinkered with her spells and hexes. It was remarkable what you could do with even the simplest techniques once you had power and the willingness to use it, and she had left her inhibitions in the casket. With just a slight variation on a standard hex

Killing Time

she had once turned an Aysen bureaucrat inside-out. That had made a lovely sound, so she wrote the recipe down, but the resulting mess was a lot to clean up, and her knees were not what they once were.

There were rats behind the baseboards that ran up her bed posts at night. She would lie awake and watch them, enjoying the way their eyes glinted in the moonlight. She read poetry to them, and fed them plates of pickled toes. They seemed significant to her, for reasons she could not recall.

Her grandson really was looking skinny—she hardly ever saw him eat. It drove her to distraction.

He said they would go through the Gate, soon, although he did not quite know what it would mean. She was looking forward to it, a change would do him good. And there would surely be skulls on the other side.

Exciting new people, with exciting new skulls.

There was a chime kept sitting on her mantelpiece, un-rung, and gathering dust. She took it down sometimes just to see it, because it was a pretty thing. But there was a reason she had once decided not to ring it, though she could no longer remember just what that reason was.

It was a shame, really. She liked music, always had. It was one of the few things she remembered from the pre-madness days—a memory bleached and faded, and now just one more skull.

Maybe she would ring the chime someday, she reflected. Some day when the omen was right.

She would know, she decided, when the time came.

For now, she had her family, and her skulls. There would always be family, and there would always be more skulls.

The trouble with immortality was finding things to do, but she had ways to kill the time.

DEX ANSCHUTZ

STRUCTURE AND STABILITY

Dobrin winced as he pushed some foliage out of his face, not having been entirely as prepared for the journey as he'd expected. There hadn't been much to read up on this destination plane—the little there was seemingly millenia out of date—so he'd had to make some logical conclusions.

He wished his logical conclusions included something to deal with the bugs.

Dobrin's heavy robes and ornamental platemail were cumbersome as ever, and in this jungle heat, near unbearable. Sailing the oceans of Ixalan hadn't been so bad, but investigating each island he came across was like delving into the infernal pit of Rix Maadi in his formal attire.

The young Azorius mage wore all his court regalia in his eager attempt to put his best foot forward when he met his hero .

The parun of his guild.

Dobrin stood tall with squared shoulders just thinking about the great honor of meeting him.

Most of his guild and the rest of Ravnica believed Azor to be a man who'd given their plane a great gift and passed a peaceful death long, long ago. Most people were not as blessed as Dobrin to be able to traverse the Multiverse and read accounts of his parun gracing other

Structure and Stability

planes' shores. He knew Azor to be a grand sphinx, and to be the father of many governments of many planes.

Dobrin wasn't so naïve as to believe Azor would return to Ravnica when he was so busy instilling order across the Multiverse, but he hoped Azor would have the time to mentor a fellow Planeswalker such as himself.

“Who goes there?”

Dobrin startled at the voice, and quickly scanned the skies for the source, mouth falling agape before he quickly shook himself to his senses and bowed before the descending form.

Azor reached his paws for the ground as he gave a few last powerful beats of his wings to steady his landing. Holding his head high as he looked down at the interloper, he hummed at the runes proudly displayed on the breastplate of his gleaming armor and blue cape.

“Supreme Judge Azor I,” Dobrin addressed with great respect. “I am Junior Elocutor Dobrin of the Jelenn Column and I have sought your counsel regarding your extraordinary work on Ravnica.”

He tentatively looked back up as he heard Azor's wings shuffle and hoped he wasn't being too presumptuous.

Azor gave an unimpressed hum. With a critical eye, he looked over the Planeswalker before him and dispassionately stated, “It has been some time since I met with a Ravnican Planeswalker. A decade at least.”

Dobrin didn't know if that was good or not, and he nervously adjusted his robes as he explained, “Born and raised on Ravnica. I spend some time helping Bant with their plight, but indeed, I'm a Planeswalker of Ravnica.”

“Bant,” Azor echoed. “Hard to imagine such a bountiful plane struggling. Were they really unable to keep the Unbeholden from insurrection? Pity.”

“A little under thirty years ago, its edges were jarringly reunited with Naya and Jund,” Dobrin explained. “Keeping order has been quite the ordeal since.”

“Ah, I would imagine,” Azor said, remembering the brief time he'd traveled through the shattered realms of Alara and decided it wasn't

worth his time.

He lowered his whole body to get a closer look at Dobrin and squinted as he tried to decipher his intentions. This young Planeswalker was a link to outside this world; he was a lifeline that Azor would be wise to hold close. “It sounds like you are upholding your duty to the Multiverse then, if you are assisting less fortunate planes to provide stability.”

Dobrin momentarily forgot his nerves as he perked up and nodded. “I’ve read so much about your work, and I was hoping you would mentor me so I could help even more!”

Azor’s stoic face was unreadable as he sat back on his haunches, stretching his wings while he thought this over. “Mentor you, you say? Yes, I suppose I could make time for that.”



Just over two months passed and Dobrin made weekly treks to visit Azor, prompt for every meeting just as a proper Azorius mage should be. Azor was intrigued by the young hieromancer, perhaps only because it was a break from the monotony his personal prison had forced upon him. Their conversations were simplistic to a great sphinx, but for a human, Dobrin was sharp and eager to use his gifts.

Azor smugly curled his tail over his paws as he thought over the key phrasing *for a human*. He listened to the man wax poetically about the peace he hoped to bring Ravnica and Bant both with his involvement, and the sphinx offered judgements on the problems dropped before him.

Week after week, Dobrin came back thankful for his help and hoping to learn more. He was a good listener, and evidently put Azor’s advice to some moderately beneficial use, but Azor could sense he was inclined to following and too unsure to reach his own judgements.

It seemed unfair that the fledgling Planeswalker had a spark when Azor knew he could put it to much better use. This thought occurred to him early and often, and the sphinx planned to right this grave wrong.

Azor longed to be on the shores of another plane after all the time

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sacrificed to this backwoods of the Multiverse. He longed to be free from the island the Failsafe had sentenced him to, and with this naïve Planeswalker's help, he believed that dream would soon be realized.

His plan was pushed to the back of his mind as Dobrin finished another long-winded speech, and he focused on pleasing the hieromancer's need for recognition.

"Yes, to answer these angels' sigils must be a great honor," Azor agreed, familiar with the system of handing out obligations others were grateful to fulfill.

"Everyone does their part," Dobrin downplayed. Two small sigils were pinned to his armor, only standing out from the Azorius platemail in their golden nature. "The angels have so much to tend to, all the knights do their best to support their commanders."

He continued to praise his student, ready to push towards his final plans and needing all the misplaced faith he could foster. "Serving the greater good is an honorable use of one's time."

Dobrin smiled a little bashfully and said, "I took inspiration from the great arbiters of justice before me."

They discussed politics, Azor careful to present himself as agreeably to Dobrin as he could. The Azorius had grown soft, and the young Planeswalker had balked at some of his early comments in their meetings, particularly in his tolerance of skipping a jury if the summary judgment was important enough.

Dobrin was short sighted, but he could use that.

As the Planeswalker finished his visit, he asked, "Next week, same time?"

"I will actually need next week to prepare, but I think you're ready to really serve the people of Ravnicia."

"I am. I'm ready to help Ravnicia in any way possible," Dobrin said with an earnest nod. Azor grinned appreciatively and Dobrin mirrored the smile. "Two weeks then."



“How I wish you could return to Ravnica with me. The guildless grow more unruly and the guilds abandon tradition more every year.”

“I’ve been working on a project that may help with that, actually,” Azor said after a hushed pause. He gazed down to the naïve elocutor with full attention, and Dobrin felt the intensity of being observed by a great mind, but tried to maintain a firm stance. “I would need your help though.”

Dobrin’s eyes lit up, but he held his reserved tone as he said, “Of course, I would do anything to help.”

He made it too easy, Azor thought, but this little charade was just a stepping stone before he could mediate real challenges again. Calling forth the artifact he’d crafted, he balanced the tiny thing on the pad of his paw and held it low for Dobrin to take.

It was gleaming gold and inlaid with jade, a maze of runes that Dobrin couldn’t immediately decipher. He looked from the device up to Azor inquisitively and asked, “What does it do?”

“It will allow me to borrow enough power to return to Ravnica.”

Dobrin ran his fingers over it in wonder as his eyes returned to the gorgeously crafted artifact. “Wow, to travel the Multiverse at will without a spark? There aren’t many stories of that, and most of them are just stories. How did you manage such a wonder?”

“The wonder will be all yours, Junior Elocutor Dobrin. Your spark will lend me the strength I need to leave Ixalan. It will be nothing compared to the strength I wielded in my prime, but it will be enough to grant me a single safe journey”

Azor walked the young Planeswalker through the simple steps, and Dobrin didn’t let him down as he followed every instruction without hesitation.

“Now, it will burn a little,” Azor warned as Dobrin finished winding the lock and prepared to press it into place. He didn’t want Dobrin to startle and break the seal before it could take hold.

“I’m ready,” Dobrin assured him, taking heart as Azor dipped his head in agreement and signaled for him to finish the task.

Azor wasn’t lying. *It did burn*, but it felt cold and hollow.

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It felt like holding ice in his hand until it melted. He closed his eyes against the uncomfortable feeling, willing the spell to take hold quickly.

Dobrin's brow crinkled with perplexion as he opened his eyes and felt an... emptiness. He didn't know how to describe it other than feeling like he was missing something, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what.

A sinking feeling hit him as he realized Azor's words never guaranteed he would be able to return to Ravnica *with Dobrin*, and he swallowed thickly as he asked, "What did you do?"

"It is a pity, but some people are destined for more important roles in the grand scheme of the Multiverse," Azor said, calling the artifact back to himself. Dobrin tried to hold onto the bauble, but his meager mortal grip was nothing in the face of an empowered sphinx, and it sailed back to Azor, shining in the sun like the beacon of power it had become. "The greater good calls for those who are... *less important* to serve them in whatever means they are capable."

Azor shook his head and concluded, "A mere Jelenn recruit can't offer the structure and stability this Multiverse needs. A plane needs my guiding wings, so that justice may soar. This spark will be put to better use now."

"My spark-" Dobrin's voice caught in his throat and he shook his head in disbelief as he replayed the weeks upon weeks in his mind, how he'd played right into Azor's paws.

Tears gathered in the corners of his eyes, and a wave of denial that his idol would do this washed over him. The sobering realization that no text on any plane claimed Azor to be kind broke over him just as quickly, and he hung his head in both hands.

"By coming here and speaking on Azorius affairs, you have come on behalf of the Azorius, ergo on behalf of its parun: *Me*," Azor spoke, lacing hieromancy into his words as built up to his final condemnation. "As per the punishment decreed by then Living Guildpact, Jace Beleren, Azor may not interfere in the life of sentient beings."

Dobrin was stuttering and Azor easily powered through another issuance of hieromancy before the man could string two words

together. “I now find you guilty of breaking this decree, and thereby sentence you to be the warden of Useless Island, a solitary punishment that I must leave you to.”

Azor allowed himself a rare smile as the elocutor sank to his knees, speechless. “You must forgive me. One with such righteous purpose as myself cannot stay detained on this island, depriving the Multiverse of my gifts.”

He flexed his wings and breathed in deeply as he felt the spark ready to carry him to the shores of a new plane. With no further delay, he took flight and pierced the fabric of Ixalan, breaking free into the Blind Eternities and beyond.

CARY THOMAS

YOU.

You were a Planeswalker.

Surely you remember that much?

Now is your chance to leave, once-Planeswalker.

All you must do is climb. Ascend, if you have the strength.

High above, an omenpath spirals into Eternities. Not the omenpaths you studied, no. Even if you could still recall the phenomena by name, this newly infinite form would bring no immediate connection to mind.

But you know it is elsewhere.

Because that elsewhere is here now. And it will not stop being here, and now. It has poured in for weeks without a moment of reprieve, flooding this world entirely, and all you can do is climb. There is no end, only escape.

You were a Planeswalker.

You are still powerful, yes? Not too weak to escape? The scorching pain in your left leg has finally subsided, however in a cruel trade it now drags behind, numb and limp. You expected yourself to move with much more haste to avoid his countering strike. A fluke. Yet, he is dead and you are alive.

You survived, as you always do. And his end, it appears, has

brought this fated pathway to you.

When your good leg slips, your arms anchor into the sand. You do not panic, just still. Breathe in. An ancient memory would identify the faint, arid wind that accompanies the ceaseless sand as Rabian, but your mind fails you. You cannot remember the world.

Readjusting takes patience. Your right leg finds hold as you shift your weight forward. Prone against the hill, your forgotten wings taunt you with means in this steepest of ascents.

You listen, both to your wings and to the ember within you which flickers in anticipation of freedom, of power. It will take the last of your strength to have everything back.

One final exchange to reach eternity. Three limbs push you off as your wings extend in a burst upwards, a flawless launch and closing in. With your gaze locked, you cannot discern whether you are approaching it or it is approaching you—perhaps both occur in this destined moment. You reach a claw forward in all too eager acceptance, but it does not yet pierce the familiar veil of rebirth.

You call for more.

There is no answer. Atrophied wings have seized and refuse to open again. The pathway recedes.

A grand serpent plummets into the dunes.

Pain ripples across your body as countless injuries loudly make themselves known. Instinctively, you quiet the voices. Your strength is spent. Nevertheless, your will remains.

You were a Planeswalker.

But that wasn't all that you were.

This is not the end. It is in your very nature to survive against all else—that was the reason he brought you here after all. Your kind cannot die so easily.

Which means *he* didn't either, did he?

This realm is now as much his as it was yours when you'd first been severed, lingering beyond. You no longer smell the smoke that alerted

You.

you to his smothering weakness, your opportunity, but he is there. You know that to be true, for where else could he go?

So it echoes across the sands of that world. You roar the name in hope, in hatred, but most of all in desperation.

And in time, your brother will answer.

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