

Nissa, Worldwaker

Kelly Digges

From set *Magic 2015*

The elf Planeswalker Nissa Revane has led a difficult life. She's been exiled from her tribe, the Joraga, on more than one occasion, and becoming a Planeswalker set her even further apart. She traveled to different worlds, seeking to understand the nature of elves' responsibility toward nature, but she always returned to her home plane of Zendikar.

Whatever peace she managed to find for herself came to an end with the rising of the monstrous Eldrazi. These vast, interplanar beings, devourers of entire worlds, had been imprisoned on Zendikar millennia before. Desperate to save her world, Nissa broke the lock that kept the Eldrazi on Zendikar. Her hope was that the Eldrazi, freed of their confines, would travel out into the Multiverse. Their threat would spread, but Zendikar would be saved.

It didn't work.

At least one of the three Eldrazi titans remains on Zendikar, threatening all life on the plane with annihilation. Nissa stayed to fight the Eldrazi, but she fears it's hopeless. To defeat the monstrosities that assault the plane, all of Zendikar would have to fight as one...

Nissa's eyes opened.

Smoke and ash swirled above her as she awoke to chaos. Nissa lay pinned on her back and she could feel earth rumble beneath her. She looked around, her mind trying to cling onto anything familiar. Nissa could hear yelling but it was distorted, as if she was hearing the ambient tumult through a long, echoing tunnel. There was a pressure that made her ears ring. She blinked her eyes hard. And then, piece by piece, she began to remember. Eldrazi had swarmed the Joraga. There had been a great blast of energy. Ulamog had returned.

Then it all rushed back into her mind in a sickening flood. Her tribe was under attack. Many had died.

As her vision cleared, Nissa could see the twisted bodies of elves amid the broken trees. Misshapen Eldrazi corpses were scattered about, the steaming remains of Ulamog's freakish spawn.

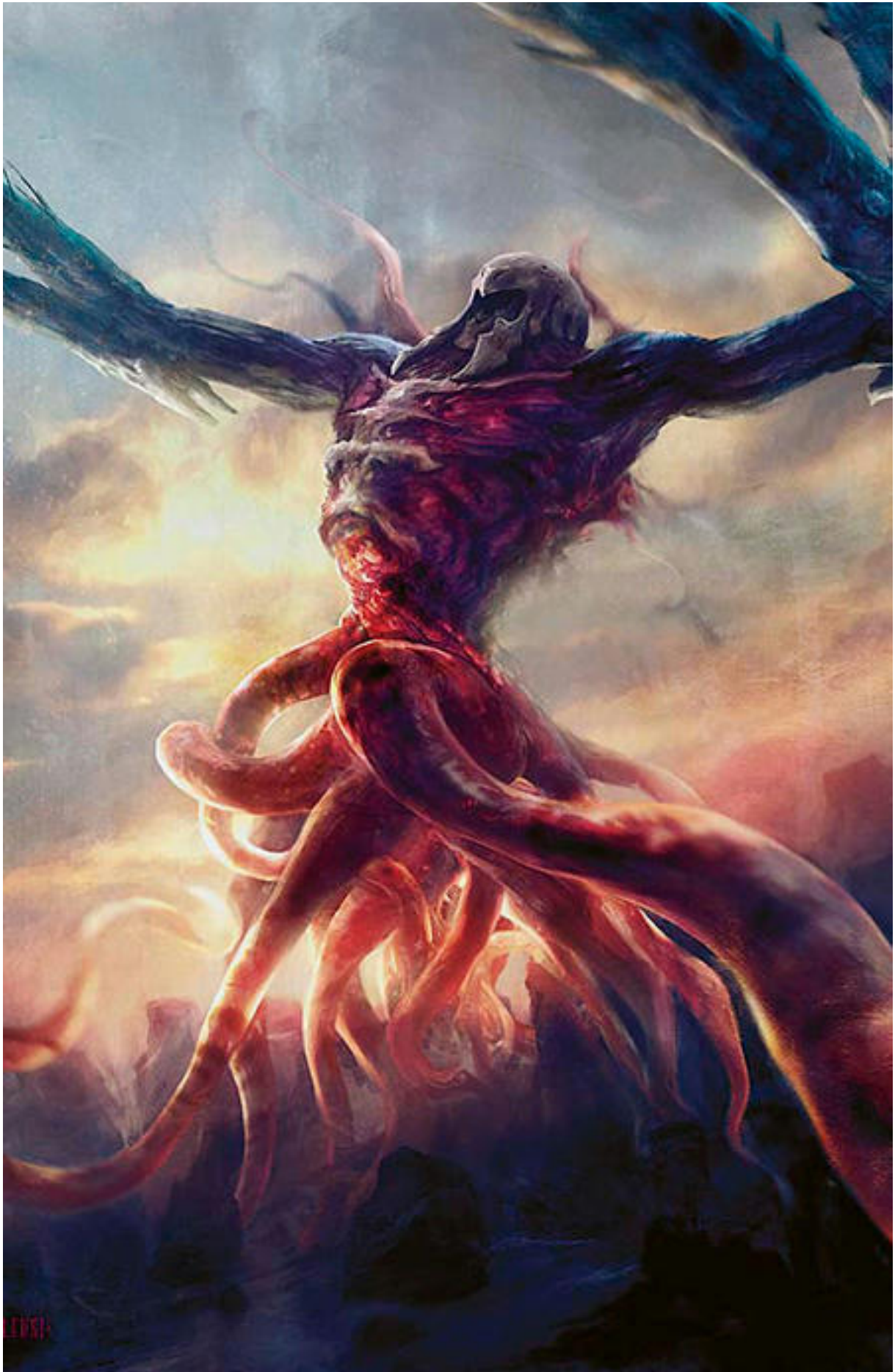


Disaster Radius | Art by James Paick

She had to move.

She moved to get up and was jerked back to the ground—her legs were trapped. A tree had been split in half and she was caught under it. She wrestled with the massive limb like a wild animal caught in a snare until the pain kicked in and she let out an involuntary scream. As she caught her breath, a series of irregular, staccato blasts tore through the ash-filled air from something high above the ground. Nissa clapped her hands to her mouth and lay as still as a stone as a low ticking sound clicked from all around her. She could only see a few feet in any direction, but she knew the source of the terrible sound was close. Its vocalizations vibrated through her bones. It was hunting.

She tried to pull forth mana to summon some form of aid, but she was drained. Planeswalking was out of the question. All Nissa could muster was a small glow of healing energy to ease the pain, but that was enough to sap her last reserves. She fell back exhausted against ground that had turned to mud from her own blood. In desperation, she called out a few times to shapes that fled the Eldrazi swarm, some humanoid, some animal, but no one answered. The taste of dirt and ash filled her mouth as she labored for breath, and she could feel her life as it left her with each heartbeat. Then she saw the massive silhouette of Ulamog grow like a dark cloud over the shattered trees, until it blocked out the hazy light of Zendikar's sun. As its shadow passed over her she heard the crystalline chewing sound it made as it devoured the life from Zendikar, leaving its signature path of destruction. She could smell the acrid stench of it and felt her stomach convulse.



Ulamog, the Infinite Gyre | Art by Aleksí Briclot

Tears streaked her cheeks as Nissa Revane looked into the swirling, smoke-filled air and waited for death.

A wild-eyed human face, streaked with dirt, looked at her. A calloused hand grabbed hers. Nissa was too weak to move. The human called out over his shoulder as the chewing sound of the titan closed in.

“Bahkut! Alira! Over here.”

He turned to Nissa. His calloused hand touched her face, and Nissa could feel the life force as it flowed from him.

“Stay alive. We’ll get you out of here.”

“Khalni bless you,” Nissa said and slipped into blackness.

Nissa awoke to smells and sounds unfamiliar to her. Her legs ached as she moved them tentatively and looked around. She felt weak but could feel a small bit strength returning.

She heard footsteps approaching. The flap of the tent lifted and the large, dark-skinned human who had pulled her from under the tree entered.

“You’re awake.” He smiled. “That’s good.”

“Where am I?” Nissa said.

Mistrust everyone. Even though the human saved her, the old Joraga instincts remained.

She felt vulnerable, naked under the furs, and she knew her full power was a long way from returning.

The human sensed her unease and held up both hands.

“Easy. You’re still healing.” He picked up her clothes from a nearby stool and set them by her. He moved slowly and deliberately as he spoke. “You’re a day’s travel from Jalesh. My name is Hamadi. You’re safe here.”

“My tribe...”

Nissa’s mind recoiled from the memories. She forced herself to ask the question.

“Did you see what happened to my tribe?”

Hamadi looked at her and told her what she already knew. “Ulamog was there. The valley, the forest. The Eldrazi left nothing but ash. I’m sorry, but from what we saw, the Joraga are no more.”

Nissa climbed through the woods. Her legs still felt stiff, but their strength was returning. It felt good to move and feel the forest flow around her like a verdant tapestry once again. Hamadi walked behind her and, for a human, he made little noise.

“Up there,” he said.

Nissa looked through the thick forest and saw an outcropping of rock high up above them where the trees gave way to the granite of the mountain.

“That ledge way up there?” Nissa said. “You must really think highly of your healing, druid.” She raised her eyebrows at Hamadi, who smiled.

“I think highly of your will, Shaya,” Hamadi said back.

“That’s a nice way to put it,” Nissa said with a smirk. “Hey. What does *Shaya* mean?”

Hamadi chuckled. “I’ll tell you later...Shaya.”

They sat on the ledge overlooking the forest below and ate nuts, dried fruit, and chakri root. Nissa could feel vigor from the root soothing her tired muscles.

“You have been more than kind, Hamadi,” Nissa said after a while. “Thank you.”

“We are in different times now. Gone are the days when we Zendikari fight one another,” Hamadi said as he handed Nissa more food. “It took creatures like the Eldrazi to teach us to live together in peace. Either they are good teachers or we are stubborn beings, eh?” He laughed.

“I guess it is in everyone, this tribalism, this need to isolate and separate.” Nissa looked at the forest below. “The Joraga drilled it into us from the moment we were born. ‘Trust no outsiders’ was something I heard since...forever. I have come a long way since then, Hamadi. I have seen too much to have such a small view of life. The kindness you have shown me has played a part as well.”

Hamadi smiled, then paused for a moment and looked at a piece of dried fruit as he turned it in his fingers. “I was from Graypelt, just outside the great forest of Turntimber.” Hamadi popped the fruit in his mouth.



Graypelt Refuge | Art by Philip Straub

“I’m sorry, Hamadi,” Nissa said. “I knew of your people. I traveled through your lands.”

“Small world, Shaya,” Hamadi said. “As you know, my people were good hunters and guides, but we made our living storing mana. Our magic was tied to the land and the trees gave to us more than we could ever repay.”

Hamadi leaned back against a stone and took a drink from a water skin.

"Many mana-hungry expedition houses came to us for trade. Back then, our pouches and stomachs were full. Our tents were warm. We thought we had reached a summit, *the* summit, but it was a false one. My tribe, the expedition houses, we were all blind."

Hamadi set down the water skin and continued.

"We had heard the rumors of the titans' devastation but we didn't believe them. How could anyone have believed it was true unless they were actually there? Never did we think that the Eldrazi would come to our lands and annihilate our people." Hamadi sighed. "We are short-lived and short-sighted beings, Shaya. Now that I have seen the titans, I know that there are realities that exist beyond our wildest imaginings. How were we to prepare for such things?"

Hamadi hung his head for a brief moment, then looked at Nissa.

But Nissa couldn't meet Hamadi's eyes. As she listened to his story, a growing ache welled up within her body and lodged itself in her throat. She was responsible for all of it, all his loss and all of Zendikar's devastation. Hamadi had pulled her, a Joraga elf, from certain death. He had risked his life and had saved hers. And she was the cause. Dark memories started to crawl into Nissa's mind from all the worst places. All her failures, her foolish choices, her selfishness and arrogance, poured into her gut like a lead weight. She became tangled in the web of her past that was filled with the bodies of a thousand innocents who had fallen to the Eldrazi. She could have saved them all.

"Hamadi," she said, as she hugged her knees. "I'm so sorry."

Nissa, followed Hamadi, Bahkut, Alira, and a pair of kor twins along a mountain path. She could feel Zendikar, restless beneath her feet, as if a great, unborn beast was moving within it. Nissa could see large chunks of the mountain floating and spinning over the trail far ahead.

"We have to rope up. Gravity fields," the kor named Khali said. Her twin brother Sha'heel never seemed to speak, preferring to use subtle hand signals or nothing at all.

Khali and Sha'heel removed their packs. Sha'heel pulled out ropes, hooks and straps, handing them to his sister as she outfitted Hamadi, Bahkut, Alira, and Nissa.



Kor Hookmaster | Art by Wayne Reynolds

“You ever been sky-climbing, Joraga?” Khali said to Nissa as she secured the straps of Nissa’s harness.

“I hate being off the earth,” Nissa said. “But I hate the Eldrazi even more.”

“Then just think about gutting those bastards and you’ll do fine.” Khali smiled as she pulled the leather strap tight and snaked a twine rope through the metal loop which effectively connected Nissa to Sha’heel. “Sha’heel’s got you now, Joraga, but don’t think you’re just along for the ride. Follow his lead as best you can.” Khali left to see to Hamadi and the other two humans. Sha’heel looked over his shoulder, stonefaced, then winked at Nissa, and went back to tying knots and coiling rope.

Once everyone was secured, they moved into the gravity fields. Nissa could feel her body as it lurched and lifted, buffeted by the powerful gravity waves, until they finally went airborne. Nissa felt stiff and awkward, like a newborn gladehart, as she watched Khali float up and hook a line to a passing boulder, her movements smooth and relaxed. The party’s anchor-lines went taut as, one by one, they all lifted off, held to the rock face by the slender but strong Kor ropes.

Khali led them through the maze of floating boulders. Nissa watched the brother and sister communicate with a series of intricate hand gestures as they made their way deeper into the gravity field. Dozens of massive boulders moved in apparent chaos as they collided and rolled. Khali and Sha’heel moved their party along, picking through the hazards with ease. Their ropes were like magical extensions of their arms, as they flicked out lines to catch passing rock faces or swung onto new boulders as they floated by. Nissa had seen Kor operate from a distance, but she never appreciated their skill and knowledge of Zendikar’s pulse and flow until then.

As the sun reached its zenith, they paused, suspended on ropes between three boulders that floated over a canyon. Alira mentioned how silent and peaceful it was a moment before a scream echoed around them. Nissa swiveled her head to find its location but the sound reflected off of the rock; she couldn’t get a bearing until Khali whistled and pointed down. Far below, Nissa could see a Pathrazer—a spawn of the titan Ulamog—emerging from under the earth before a scattered group of adventurers.

Nissa couldn't tell whether they were humans, elves, or kor, but it didn't matter. Her eyes were on the Eldrazi and she wanted it dead.



Pathrazer of Ulamog | Art by Austin Hsu

Nissa looked over her shoulder to see Sha'heel pull out a knife and cut his anchor lines with one smooth motion. Nissa heard the ropes pop as Sha'heel plunged toward the ground in a free fall.

"That bastard's mine, Sha'heel!" Nissa yelled as she pulled at her buckles and wriggled out of her harness.

Energy surged within Nissa and vines writhed from the side of the boulder in an explosion of growth and sunk their roots deep into the rock. Nissa willed them to her and rode the tangle of vines down to the ground. Below Nissa, Sha'heel had opened up a kitesail and sped toward the Eldrazi, a hook-line in his hand, as the Eldrazi emerged in a cloud of dust and rock.

Ten travelers were strewn about. Some had been hurled to the ground when the Pathrazer lifted an immense chunk of earth skyward. Others stood awestruck. Some bolted in panic. Before anyone could act, the Pathrazer had grabbed several of the expedition and crushed them in its tentacled hand.

Sha'heel swooped low and set an anchor hook into the Pathrazer's rubbery flesh. The Eldrazi swatted at him as Sha'heel executed a series of tight spirals and let out a tangling line of rope. Then Khali streaked across the Eldrazi's legs and trailed another tangling line. The Eldrazi swiped at the Kor as the remaining expedition warriors shot arrows in blind hope of hitting something vital.

"This isn't going to hold it, Joraga!" Khali yelled as she ditched her kitesail into some rocky cover and rolled out of sight. "Do something!"

Nissa hit the ground running. She felt the power well up within her and a savage smile broke across her face. She was going to destroy that freak of nature. It was going to pay for everything. Twice.



Nissa, Worldwaker | Art by Peter Mohrbacher

The Kor's ropes popped as the Eldrazi freed itself, but all sounds were overwhelmed by the bone-shaking rumble of the land as it came to life. Green fire shot out from Nissa into the earth. She could feel her reservoir of power swelling and she emptied it all into her spell. A massive elemental emerged in several enormous chunks, tearing itself from the side of the canyon in a shower of earth. The Eldrazi turned, only to be grabbed by a massive hand made from rock, roots, and dirt.

Nissa pushed every ounce of energy into the elemental and, as it squeezed the Eldrazi, she crushed the pain of her past along with it. Nissa gritted her teeth. No more would she allow such monsters to exist. No more would she be a bystander on this plane—on any plane. Zendikar flowed into her

being and its power focused her will. The Eldrazi struggled and clawed at the earthen colossus but the elemental only tightened its grip. Nissa willed two other elementals to emerge in a thunder of earth. The towering behemoths closed in on the writhing Eldrazi as it emitted a burst of staccato sounds that tore through the air, but its sounds were soon cut off as the other two hulks bludgeoned the Pathrazer into a wriggling mass of unrecognizable flesh.



Stirring Wildwood | Art by Eric Deschamps

As the dust settled around them, Sha'heel looked at Nissa.

"Whoa."

Khali, Alira, and Bakhut attended to the surviving expedition members while Sha'heel inspected the massive corpse of the Pathrazer. Hamadi clambered down the long trail of vines, and Nissa met him at the bottom.

"I knew the land spoke to you," Hamadi said with a laugh. "But I never thought it *roared* to you!"

"I can't lie, Hamadi," Nissa said, as she wiped the sweat from her brow. "That felt *really* good."

"Zendikar wants to be free of these things. It gives you its power like no other I have seen." Hamadi clapped Nissa on the shoulder. "It has chosen you, Shaya."

"Are you going to tell me what that means?" Nissa asked.

Hamadi smiled at her.

"It means 'Worldwaker.'"

