

Wool Over the Eyes

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From set *Rivals of Ixalan*

HUATLI, ON KALADESH



Inspiring Vantage | Art by Jonas De Ro

Huatli couldn't stop smiling.

She emerged into a city unlike any she had seen before. The air was warm, like home, but nothing else was familiar. The city fairly vibrated with creativity and ingenuity, and Huatli marveled at the buildings and devices and . . . *things* . . . these people had crafted. Spheres to ride around in! Little metal creatures that delivered packages! She wandered a market that smelled of strange, unfamiliar spices, and watched as strange blue currents twisted like rivers in the sky. The people here walked fast and talked even faster, and their market stalls were crammed with beautiful inventions unlike any Huatli had seen before. There were people of different species—short humanoids, tall blue people (with six fingers on each hand!), and charcoal-like beings with bright blue light flowing under their skin. Huatli was elated to have the chance to meet them all.

None of her tamales had made it through the journey (they had crumbled to an inedible dust somewhere in the metaphysical space between Ixalan and here), so she traded a piece of amber from home for a bag full of odd-looking coins. They jingled in her pack as she walked, and she wondered if she would be able to find an inn to stay in for the night in a place as busy and overwhelming as this.

As she made her way through the city, she got a few odd looks, but every stare was quickly followed up by a compliment on the intricacies of her armor.

“What craftsmanship! Who’s your artificer?” they asked. Huatli smiled happily and announced in response, “I have no idea what that is!”

She asked a nearby shopkeeper to recommend an exciting place for a visitor and was directed to a large open-air plaza in the center of the city. She soon arrived at an exhibition filled with people craning for a look at the stage, which was raised above the plaza and flanked on one side by a large tent.

Huatli spotted a group watching the stage, holding pads of paper and writing utensils in their hands. She knew that she had found her people, and moved to sit beside them, her own paper and lead in her hand.

A figure came out onto the stage, their skin black like charcoal, with deep cracks that revealed swirling blue light underneath. The figure was clothed in opulent silks that hung elegantly across their strange, dissipating body. They waved, the crowd cheered, the people with the pens took notes and asked questions, and Huatli was excited to be caught up in the action. The figure motioned for the audience to quiet, and gestured theatrically toward an object covered with a cloth at the end of the stage.

“Welcome, distinguished guests!”

Their voice was light and joyful, and commanded the attention of the crowd around Huatli.

“Like many of you, I have focused my existence on improving the lives of those around me. Aether-born culture is centered around making the most of the time we are given, of celebrating the glorious ecstasy of *being alive*. All things must end. But what if that end were easier for those of us who must meet it sooner?”

The audience murmured as the person (*the aetherborn?*) drew back the cloth over the concealed object, revealing an ornate golden box.

“This is the aether regulator, an instrument *not* for the energy regulation of aether-consuming devices, but for aether-made *people*. It is a medical device that will ease uncomfortable symptoms of dissipation and allow aetherborn persons a more dignified, pain-free transition back into the aether cycle!”

The audience clapped enthusiastically, and the people to either side of Huatli took furious notes.

Huatli was awed. Her brain turned over trying to understand what the inventor had discussed, and she marveled at the fusion of science and empathy. She wanted to ask questions: How did it work? What was the aether cycle? How revelatory would this device be for a group of people she didn’t know existed until a few minutes ago? Huatli felt a tug on her sleeve and turned to find a woman of about her age staring back at her.



Saheeli Rai | Art by Willian Murai

With a concerned look on her face, the woman leaned closer to Huatli and whispered, “Are you from here?”

Huatli shook her head. “No! I’m from . . . out of town.”

The woman’s eyes darted back and forth. She leaned in even closer. “*Off of plane* out of town?”

Huatli smiled. “You’re a Planeswalker, too!” she guessed excitedly.

“Not here!” the woman said, waving her hands alarmedly as she shooed Huatli away from the stage.

Together they navigated through the crowd with some difficulty—the woman kept getting stopped by strangers asking for her autograph—and made their way toward a nearby park. Massive statues lined the pavilion, and Huatli assumed that the bold poses they struck reflected their subjects’ important accomplishments.

“I apologize for interrupting,” the woman said. “My name is Saheeli. Your outfit is incredible—I had a hunch you might be a Planeswalker too.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Saheeli. My name is Huatli. It’s my first time away from my world,” Huatli said. “What is this one called?”

“This plane is Kaladesh, and this city is Ghirapur. You picked a good time to arrive. Where are you from?”

Huatli thought for a moment and sat down on a bench. She kept getting distracted by the plumes of blue streaking across the sky above. “The continent I’m from is called Ixalan, so I suppose that is what my plane is called, too.”

“*Ixalan* . I haven’t heard of that one before!” Saheeli smiled. “What is it like?”

Huatli paused. How could she describe her home to someone who had never seen it before?

The only way I know how.

"It is a land as bright as the sun. The air, thick with light. And the soil, dark with life. Endless trees coat endless vistas. And dinosaurs answer the songs of my people."

Saheeli's eyes were wide with curiosity. "What is a dinosaur?"

Huatli frowned. "Scales? Feathers?"

Saheeli stared blankly back at her.

"Some as short as your knees, others as tall as a building? Do you not have them around here?"

"No, but I'd love to make one!" Saheeli grinned and pulled Huatli up off the bench. "We are going back to my workshop *right now* so you can describe them to me. I've been needing a new artificing project!"

Huatli allowed herself to be dragged up and smiled in response. "Can I help?"

"Of course you can! You're the expert. I need to know *everything* about dinosaurs!"

Huatli was elated.

She was exactly where she needed to be.

The two Planeswalkers happily walked back to Saheeli's workshop.

And Huatli told Saheeli about her home.

ANGRATH

It looked just like he remembered.

The road was dusty and broad, peppered here and there with stores that had been in business longer than he had been alive. It was a sleepy sort of place, and Angrath was happy very little had changed.

A little plume of smoke was rising from his foundry. A hand-painted window on the outside read "OPEN" in blocky lettering. The building was little more than a shack on the far end of town, but it had been *his* shack on the far end of town. Piles of iron and metal were stacked outside, and a number of items and weapons were hung on a rack, each tagged to mark which order was which.

Angrath's ear flicked as he heard the clang of metal and sizzle of water inside.

He approached, and his chains clanked with each step he took.

Angrath ducked slightly to avoid hitting his head on the doorway (he could still make out the bumps in the wood from every time he had forgotten) and paused as he looked for the blacksmith at work.

Two minotaurs glanced up from their anvils. They were tall like their mother had been. They wore bulky leather aprons, and their horns were adorned with the jewelry worn by unmarried women of their age.

Their eyes went wide. The one on the right snorted in shock. The other's ears stood up in surprise.

The one on the right sniffed the air and trembled with emotion. "Father?"

Steam softly hissed where Angrath's tears met his skin. He smiled.

"Rumi. Jamira. I'm home."

VRASKA

It felt almost unfamiliar to pass through the Blind Eternities after having not done so for such a long time. She had passed through just as the planar portal closed, and as quickly as she had departed Ixalan, she was standing back in her own chamber on Ravnica.

It smelled like home. Vraska was immeasurably pleased with herself.

She immediately crossed to her favorite chair and picked up the history book she had been reading when she left. Tucked inside was a new letter.

Only two words, “MEDITATION PLANE,” appeared in familiar, elegant script.

Vraska grinned. She cheerily shrugged off her jacket and began to change out of her sweat-stained clothes (no need to rush, after all). She picked up her book and walked to her bookcase to shelve it. As she set it back in its place on the shelf, her eyes wandered to a title she hadn’t picked up in a while. She contemplated the book, pulling it down and then absent-mindedly setting it on the table next to her chair.

It would have to wait until after she met with the dragon, of course.

Ready to depart, she planeswalked through a slice of black in the air to the meditation plane.



Pools of Becoming | Art by Jason Chan

Nicol Bolas was waiting for her.

She arrived in the now-familiar water, surrounded by a magical cage. Vraska performed the unlocking spell from her first visit perfectly, and the cage vanished.

She stared at the dragon, and he stared back.

“I did what you asked,” Vraska said. “Take a look for yourself.”

And he did.

Nicol Bolas investigated every corner of her mind with a scrutiny she could *feel*. He peered into each corner of her memories of Ixalan and replayed them all in the blink of an eye. Vraska winced at the feeling. It was like having her insides scrubbed clean.

She watched internally as he looked over the entirety of her mind like a mural. Vraska didn't mind. She felt proud at what she had accomplished.

She remembered journeying upriver alone . . .



Highland Lake | Art by Noah Bradley

bravely diving into the river that ran through the city . . .



Resplendent Griffin | Art by Sam Rowan

watching as a sphinx rampaged through Orazca . . .



Sphinx's Decree | Art by Daarken

and standing atop the Immortal Sun to turn said sphinx—along with dozens of other enemies—into gold.



Golden Demise | Art by Deruchenko Alexander

Vraska remembered it all as clear as day, and gladly laid bare her mind for Nicol Bolas to inspect.

Then, suddenly, the feeling vanished. The dragon departed her mind, and as he left, she saw how transparently happy with her mission he was.

Nicol Bolas practically *beamed* with joy.

His claws curled in pleasure.

“Well done, Vraska,” he said. **“You will be rewarded for your loyalty.”**

Vraska bowed, her mind her own once again, and felt the weight of something manifest in her pocket.

“A gift, faithful servant. You have earned a kingdom of your own design.”

“Thank you for your trust.”

“The thanks are all mine. I would very much like to work with you again in the future.”

“You know how to reach me,” Vraska said with a professional’s smile.

Nicol Bolas waved his hand to signal that they were finished, and Vraska departed.

The meeting had taken only a few minutes. Vraska arrived back in her flat in Ravnica feeling . . . confused.

Bolas had been satisfied, and yet she found herself thinking that he had missed something important . . . or was it her who was missing something? She felt unsettled, though she could not remember anything that might be missing . . . or why.

Vraska dismissed the feeling. The dragon got what he wanted, and she got what she wanted! She put her hand in her pocket and pulled out a small piece of paper.

“HE IS ALONE AND IMPRISONED HERE,” it read in the same wandering flourish as Nicol Bolas’s earlier messages. “CONGRATULATIONS, GUILDLIDER VRASKA.” The location listed below the mes-

sage was in a sparsely populated corner of the city. A perfect place to deal with filth in an appropriately sinister manner.

Vraska smiled and wandered to her sink. Tonight would be a fun night after all, and Vraska reasoned she ought to look and feel her best before she left. Her task could wait for a few hours.

She cleaned her face with a cloth, put the kettle on the stove, opened the memoir she had pulled from her bookshelf, and contemplated what she ought to say to Jarad before she petrified him.

JACE

Jace had shrouded himself in invisibility as the Immortal Sun vanished, watching as Vraska planeswalked away. A barrage of familiar faces had fallen through the ceiling the moment the Immortal Sun was gone. He had watched, perfectly hidden, as they bickered and left in a huff.

Malcolm and Breeches were still in the room above. Jace reached out to Malcolm (certainly the more reliable of the two) and sent him a simple message. He felt Malcolm pause above him.

Captain is safe, but far away, Jace thought, choosing his words carefully. *I'm leaving for a while, but need you to tell the crew how much you all meant to me.*

You'll always be a crewmate, Jace, said a gentle tenor voice in Jace's mind. *You were an excellent pirate.*

Who says I'm going to stop now? Jace thought with a grin. *Raise hell, Malcolm.*

You too, Jace.

Jace closed the connection and felt as Malcolm departed, his mind traveling farther and farther away.

He watched as each of the other people in Azor's chamber left, and then allowed himself to become visible once more.

Jace knew he needed to go to Dominaria, but paused.

The evening air of Ixalan was drifting into the sanctum. Calls of nightbirds and dinosaurs echoed over the hum of insects in the setting sun.

His mind drifted to the promise of coffee and a book. The thought of it made his insides twirl like leaves in the wind. He remembered his captain's confident voice and steady love for herself, no matter what frightening gifts she was born with (finally, someone who understood what that burden felt like). She would do anything for her community, and had sacrificed part of herself to ensure the survival of Ravnica.

She was remarkable.

And she thought he was, too.

Jace smiled to himself and looked around the sanctum. It was a beautiful room, despite the massive hole in the ceiling. Ixalan was a strange, ridiculous, and wonderful place. Jace hoped he could come back with Vraska again someday. Meet the crew of the *Belligerent*. Go on a few more raids for the hell of it. But that would have to wait; he didn't want to be like Azor.

Jace looked down at himself.

The tan was real. The scrapes, the newly callused hands, the muscles (the muscles!) were all his. Jace felt proud of his body for the first time in his life. He must not lose track of it now. Gideon would help with that—he'd been trying to foist a workout regimen on Jace for a year now.

A thought halted Jace's inner momentum. *What am I supposed to say when I meet the Gatewatch?*

Jace began to panic. *Do any of them know Vraska? What if they're in the middle of something? What if they have already left for somewhere else and I can't find them to tell them about Ravnica? What if they went back to Innistrad, or Kaladesh, or Zendikar? What if they're with Ugin?! What the hell am I supposed to say to Ugin?! "Hey, so about your friend, you know, the one you haven't talked to in a thousand years; he's on an island now because he's terrible. Also, you were trying to use me to lure Bolas to Ixalan to be imprisoned, weren't you? What stopped you on Tarkir? Has everything you've ever done actually just been about defeating Nicol Bolas? If so, we're going to need you to step up."*

Jace felt incredibly small. None of these questions would help him now. None of his hand-wringing would protect his home. He made a choice to set his questions aside. Ravnica must come first. He was the Living Guildpact, but he was more than that, too. Jace's mouth tilted in a half-smile. *I am someone who devises a plan so a pirate captain can sabotage a dragon. That is who I am.*

Azor's chamber was dark, now. Little lights danced in the jungle beyond, and the canopy was bathed in moonlight.

He couldn't delay any longer.

Planeswalking was a tricky business; it was imperfect, and destinations could usually only be reached if one had been there before. More often than not, traveling to a new plane was achieved by focusing on a familiar Planeswalker. Jace's first instinct was to reach his friends on Dominaria by focusing on Liliana, but the thought of her gave him pause. What he felt for her now wasn't anything resembling affection. It felt more sickly than that. An anemic, old, anxious tether between them that felt more like dread than tenderness. The entire notion of her was unsettling him, so he focused on the others instead.

The bright, brilliant goodness of Gideon shone across the Blind Eternities like a searchlight, so Jace decided to aim for that.

Jace felt his physical form shimmer and fade, and he stepped forward into the aether, accustomed to the sound and light that greeted him.



Omniscience | Art by Jason Chan

But something was wrong.

Gideon's position on Dominaria was moving—not just at normal walking speed or mounted speed, but faster than he had any reason to be going.

How is he moving like that?!

His heart began to race as he realized that he was going to need to aim.

Jace adjusted his course through the aether, keeping his destination locked on Gideon's position, quickly accounting for his velocity of travel. He tucked his arms into his sides, minutely shifted his course to match the speed of whatever the hell it was he was apparently going to land on, and felt as the veil of Dominaria approached.

He couldn't see his destination, of course, but he had the general idea of the size and shape of the thing he was aiming for. What gave Jace pause was the fact that Gideon appeared to be traveling at a *very* high velocity. He swore and adjusted his vector once more. *WHAT IS HE TRAVELING ON?*

Jace knew full well if he failed to do this correctly he would either planeswalk into a solid object or planeswalk in front of the object just in time to be hit by it.

The parts of his brain that weren't focused on travel and trajectory were an endless chorus of curses. He distantly noted that Vraska would have been proud of how his vocabulary had expanded.

Through the aether he could sense Gideon, his target, and concentrated as he slowed himself down just enough to not materialize in solid matter.

Jace stepped through the aether forcefully and immediately caught himself on a wall. He let out a long breath, then inhaled the air of a new plane.

The first thing he heard was the creak of wood and the soothing hum of a machine.

He realized he had landed in something slightly gooey, and looked up to see who was nearby.

The room was full of people staring back at him.

Jace caught his breath and awkwardly waved.

"Hello. Hi. Sorry. I really didn't expect to land that," he panted. "Had to adjust my trajectory because of your velocity." Jace shook the nervousness from his limbs and laughed. "Wow! I've never planeswalked onto a moving object before—what exactly are we riding in? How is it powered? How fast are we going?" He pointed vaguely at the structure around him as he breathlessly rambled out questions.

He looked from face to face and found absolutely no insight. He heard quick footsteps on metal and saw Gideon skid out from a nearby door, eyes wide and body frozen with shock. His expression was overcome with emotion. This was someone who was happy to the point of tears to see that he was alive. This was a friend.

Jace grinned with elation. "Gideon! I'm not dead!"

He saw Gideon lurching forward to hug him, but one of the other people in the room abruptly stepped in his way. She appeared to be in her seventies. She wore thick red robes, and her silver hair was tied in a loose, somewhat frizzy braid at her side. She looked Jace up and down with a distant, amused smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. The woman looked over her shoulder at Gideon and raised an eyebrow.

"Who's the bookworm?"



Looming Altisaur | Art by Lars Grant-West

Apatzec smiled as he watched his xocolātl tip from side to side in his cup. Each lumbering step of the sauropod underneath his caravan nearly sent the liquid spilling over one side, leaving the surface teetering on the cup's rim before gravity swung it back to the other side with the next step. The dinosaur's steps beat a slow but steady drumbeat that echoed in Emperor Apatzec III's heart.

Part of him wondered if the River Heralds would think to take Orazca first, but the rest of him remembered how spineless they were. This would be easy.

The emperor's platform was tightly strapped to the Sun Empire's most resilient altisaur for the journey to Orazca, which Apatzec enjoyed greatly. As royalty, he never had much reason to leave the palace. The royal processional platform had grown dusty with disuse. Huatli's return—and the dinosaur she brought with her—gave him all the reason he needed to order the platform cleaned and readied for his journey.

Despite Huatli's insistence on a peace agreement, Apatzec knew what was *his*. He had immediately sent a battalion of his strongest knights to clear the city, and was now on his way to claim it in the name of the Sun Empire.

The mission had gone off without a hitch. The city was empty. The River Heralds hadn't even *tried*.

Above the tips of the trees in front of him, he could make out the golden spires of Orazca. They pierced the sky like needles and glittered in the afternoon sun like a jewel. Apatzec marveled at the sight, and wondered how the poets of the future would describe the scene. The emperor was not one for flowery language. All he knew was that he was satisfied to have done what his mother could not.

Orazca was revealing itself on either side of him, now. The trees gave way to pillars of endless gold as they entered the city. The buildings reached high into the sky above, high enough to make Apatzec marvel at how his ancestors could have built so tall. Even Apatzec's altisaur easily passed underneath the main archway.

With some assistance, Apatzec descended from the platform to the ground. The procession had stopped at the base of a central temple, and hundreds of knights were in formation awaiting his arrival. A priest slipped a cloak of feathers over his shoulders and placed a staff of amber in his hand.

Apatzec felt the weight of his ancestors in his cloak. He felt the presence of an unbroken line of emperors before him, and felt immeasurably proud to have reclaimed what had been lost. He turned to his people, and smiled.

“Orazca is ours once more,” he said. “The three aspects of the sun shine bright, and thus begins a new age of conquest for the Sun Empire. Ixalan is ours . . . and Torrezon is next.”



Rekindling Phoenix | Art by Jason Rainville