

Hedron Alignment

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From set *Battle for Zendikar*

It was a trying battle, but with help and advice from trusted Zendikari advisors, Gideon led his army to a victory at Sea Gate. It took the talents of all of Zendikar's disparate forces: Drana and her legion of vampires, Noyan Dar and his roilmages, Tazri and her ground troops, the skyriders, the goblins, the kor, Nissa and her force of elementals, and Kiora, who showed up with a contingent of sea creatures just in time to turn the tide. Gideon learned a lot about both the Zendikari and himself as they battled for days side by side—things he hopes to use now as he leads the army toward what is to come next.

Kiora took the lighthouse stairs two at a time, climbing toward the chamber where she had learned that Gideon would be “leading a meeting of important Zendikari minds.” Her lack of invitation was clearly an oversight. She marched in.



Kiora, the Crashing Wave | Art by Tyler Jacobson

Her entrance elicited a hush from the group inside. They were an odd bunch, even by Zendikari standards: an elf, a human, a kor, and a vampire. They stared at her, or rather glared, annoyed at the interruption.

Gideon was the only one grinning. “I have some questions for you.”

“I bet you do.” And she had some directives for him. She had come here with a purpose. When she had arrived at Sea Gate, she had challenged Gideon to keep up with her in battle, and he had—for the most

part. Perhaps he wasn't as appalling an ally as she had first thought. She had come here to see if he could be useful in what was about to come.

"First, I'd like you to meet my trusted advisors." Gideon pointed to each Zendikari in turn. "Drana, Tazri, Nissa, and Mun—" But he never finished introducing the kor. The door banged open. Kiora spun, instinctively raising her bident.

"Ulamog!" An armored merfolk stood in the doorway, panting. "Ulamog is coming!"

For a breath, the room was silent. Kiora's mind reeled. Could it really be that easy? She'd thought they were going to have to track down the titan. But if he was coming this way, right to her, then this was it. This was the moment she'd been waiting for. She thrust her bident in the air. "Yes!"

"No!" Gideon pushed past her, his thick arm jostling her weapon.

"It's true," the merfolk gasped, out of breath, her gills sucking uselessly.

"How far? How long?" Kiora shouldered Gideon aside. If he was going to push, then she'd push back. "Where did you see him?"

"We were this close." The merfolk gestured to indicate the distance between herself and Kiora as though to say she was face to face with Ulamog. An exaggeration. Kiora looked her up and down. If this merfolk had really been that close to the titan, she wouldn't be standing here now to tell the tale.

"Jori, where?" Gideon asked.

"Back in..." The merfolk, Jori's, voice trailed off. "It was...he was headed this way, and then Jace..."

"Jace! Where is he?" Gideon glanced around as though expecting to see this Jace materialize.

"He's..." Jori dropped her gaze. "He..."

Gideon slumped. "I'm sorry he left you. Just because we can doesn't mean—"

"He didn't leave," Jori said. "He didn't do that thing, that plane-walk thing you all do. We escaped together."

Ah, now that made more sense. The merfolk had a Planeswalker to help her out. Still, Kiora thought, the proximity to Ulamog had to be an exaggeration. No one could get that close to the titan and survive. Not unless they were prepared. She gripped the god's bident. *Come on, Ula.*

"The hedrons, then?" Gideon asked. "Did Jace solve the puzzle?"

"I don't know," Jori said. "We were still a ways from the Eye when it happened. He went ahead, but used his mind mystique to force me to turn around. I thought we should stay together, but someone had to warn you. He was right about that."

"A titan on the way." The kor shook his head. "What do we do?" He nodded to the seawall out the window, thick with celebrating Zendikari. "What do we do with them?"

"Evacuate." Tazri, the human with a glowing halo around her neck, spoke firmly, like she was in charge.

No, Kiora thought. *We—*

"Plan an assault," Drana, the vampire, said.

Exactly.

"Absolutely not," Tazri said. "An assault would be suicide."

"An assault is the only reason I'm here," Drana said. "I didn't bring my legion all this way just to retreat."

Kiora could come to appreciate this vampire.

"I agree," Nissa, the elf with the glowing green eyes, spoke up. "We cannot run away. We fought too hard for this. Zendikar fought too hard for this."

"We fought for a stronghold, a place to fortify, not a place to die," Tazri countered. She turned to Jori. "If the threat is real, we can't stay."

"The threat is real," Jori confirmed.

"Then we have no choice." Tazri turned to Gideon. "Commander-General, do we have the order to evacuate?"

Gideon hesitated just for a moment, but a moment was all Kiora needed. "Evacuation isn't an option." She stepped in. "There's nowhere left to evacuate to. It's time to fight back!" She raised her bident. "I'll lead the offensive."

"Impressive." The vampire clapped. "I think I just might join you."

"This is mutiny!" Tazri stepped between Drana and Kiora. "Now is not the time to divide our forces. We stick to the plan and we stay together. When we know if we can use the hedrons—"

"We don't need the hedrons." Kiora said. "We have this." She twirled her bident, smiling.

"What is it?" Jori asked.

"Only the most powerful artifact on all of Zendikar—you're welcome. More powerful than the hedrons." She eyed Tazri. "Those rocks have been here forever, and I haven't seen them do anything to stop the Eldrazi. This, on the other hand, this is new. Watch." She swept the bident outward, calling the tide, and as she swept it in again, a perfectly aimed wave from the sea rose up and shot straight through the window without so much as brushing the frame. It rained down on those in the room.



Promo Bident of Thassa | Art by Ryan Yee

"Wow." Jori stared reverently at Kiora and the bident.

Kiora winked. "Told you."

"We don't have time for this," Tazri sputtered, wiping salty seawater from her face. "Commander-General, we have to—"

"Slay the titan!" Kiora lifted her bident and her voice. She looked to the others. "This is our chance. This is our moment. Look what we did out there." She thrust the bident at the window. "If we can overcome a massive Eldrazi swarm, we can slay the titan."

"I like the plan," Drana said. "Or rather the inkling of an idea that we can construct a proper plan around."

Kiora's stomach fluttered. *Yes*. She didn't care about the technicalities, the vampire was on her side.

"We'll have the power of the whole sea behind us," Jori said, nodding at the bident. "I think we have a chance."

Kiora stood up straighter. *Yes*.

"The power of the sea is mighty, but it will take more than that," Nissa said. "I will bring the land to aid. If we work together, I believe we can do this."

This was it! Finally Kiora had found people who wouldn't back down. "So who's with me?" She cried. "Who's ready to put an end to Ulamog once and for all?"

Cheers rose up in the little lighthouse room.

"I will not allow you to do this," Tazri barked.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's not your decision to make," Drana said. She looked to Gideon "I believe it is yours, Commander-General."

Kiora followed her gaze. This was the moment of truth. Was Gideon the ally she hoped he would be?

They were all looking at him. Every one of them. As they should be. Gideon was the Commander-General. And as Commander-General, it was to him to give the order. And that's what he would do.

In a moment.

Maybe two.

He had to think. He had to work out the best course of action. There had to be a best course of action.



Gideon, Champion of Justice | Art by David Rapoza

“Do we have the order to evacuate?” Tazri prompted.

“I heard you the first time, Tazri.” Gideon didn’t mean to snap. He cleared his throat. “I just need a moment.” Both Tazri and Kiora opened their mouths, but Gideon cut them off. “A *silent* moment.”

There was grumbling behind him as Gideon turned away from them, but he ignored it. He strode to the window and looked out, shielding his eyes from the glaring sun. The horizon was a flat line. There was no sign of the horror that Jori had promised was coming. But he believed her; he had heard the rumors, the titan moved slowly. Slowly enough that Jace could get here first with the secret to using the hedrons? There was no way to know.

Without the hedrons, they needed something else, another advantage that would tilt the scales in their favor. He thought of Kiora and the god’s bident. A powerful weapon, to be sure. But one weapon and one mage—a flash behind his eyes and he was staring at the fallen Irregulars.



Tragic Arrogance | Art by Winona Nelson

He blinked, forcing the image away. He had learned that lesson long ago.

Gideon sighed, looking down at the Zendikari gathered on the seawall. Their presence here, all together like this, was most likely the reason that the titan was headed this way. The Eldrazi could not resist the siren-like call of so much life. They were sitting bait.

No! He pounded his fists on the window ledge. He had learned that lesson too. These people were not helpless. Far from it. They were strong. They were brave. They were capable. They were his army.

They had come together from all across Zendikar. They who had put aside their differences—more, they had learned to use their differences as assets. And they had overcome a horde of Eldrazi so thick that it would take weeks, if not months, to burn all the alien corpses.

They were a fighting force the likes of which Zendikar had never seen before and most likely would never see again. That was a lot. That was more than a lot. That was...Gideon smiled to himself; it might just be the advantage that they needed.

He turned to face the others, and he gave his orders. “We do not evacuate. We stay and we fight. And we kill the titan.”

Tazri gasped.

“Ha!” Kiora lifted her bident. “Yes!”

“Bravo.” Drana clapped.

“Nissa,” Gideon said, launching into the details of his plan even as he worked it out. “You will lead two land contingents. And by land, I mean, you know, the actual land. The dirt and rock and all that.” Gideon mimicked the striding movement of one of Nissa’s elementals. “Bring one force in from each side of the seawall.”

Nissa nodded.

“Kiora,” Gideon continued, “you will coordinate a sea attack.”

“Of course I will. I don’t need you to—” A knock at the door interrupted Kiora’s insubordination—lucky for her.

It was Ebi, one of the sentries Gideon had stationed around Sea Gate. At the sight of the kor’s face peering in the door, Gideon’s chest constricted. He feared that Ebi was coming to tell him the sentries had seen Ulamog. Not yet; they needed more time.

“I think I found something you’ve been looking for, Commander-General.” Ebi waved behind him, and Gideon caught a glimpse of something blue moving on the other side of the door—something blue he recognized...

“Jace!” Gideon could breathe again.

The mind mage stepped across the threshold. “Look who has been practicing his powers of prediction.”

Gideon closed the distance and embraced the smaller man, slapping him on the shoulder. Jace was always so tense. He smiled at Ebi. “Thank you.”

“Sir.” Ebi nodded.

“And the perimeter?” Gideon hedged, pressing his luck.

“Secure,” Ebi said.

“Good.” Gideon let out a breath. Good. They would have a little more time.

Ebi shifted, seeming to sense the tension in the room. “I’ll be going back to my post then.”

“Thank you, Ebi.”

As the kor sentry closed the door behind him, Gideon turned back to Jace. He had been looking for one advantage, and now he had two. The odds were shifting in their favor; this battle was now theirs to lose. “The hedrons,” he said. “The Eye. Tell me everything.”

Everything was so much better than Jace had imagined it would be. He had predicted he was going to have to help Gideon assemble the army, find the most advantageous location, and amass the hedrons to build the prison—the prison that he still believed could be transformed into a deadly weapon regardless of what Ugin had said. But here it was, all laid out before him: a formidable army, a workable location, and more than half the hedrons he would need, floating out there above the sea. Now he merely had to move the pieces into place...*carefully*.



Hedron Archive | Art by Craig J Spearing

He didn't have to read any of the minds in the small room to know that there was an excessive amount of tension. Jori was here, looking ragged and a little worse for wear, which presumably meant she had only recently arrived and thus almost certainly just delivered the news about Ulamog. So it followed that the glares and aggressive stances indicated that those in the room were not in agreement about what to do concerning the titan's approach.

Nissa looked ready to fight, as did the merfolk who Jace didn't know, and the vampire. But Tazri and the kor seemed less convinced, and Jace couldn't tell yet where Jori stood. It was to him, then, to get them all on the same page; he needed everyone behind him if he hoped to execute successfully. A meeting of minds, if not coerced or nudged magically, which he would have to seriously consider if it came to that, could be achieved by weaving the correct and most alluring narrative. It was all about information deployment. "You reclaimed Sea Gate," he said, smiling. "Impressive." And a little about stoking egos.

"I had a whole army—" Gideon started.

But the second merfolk, the one Jace did not know, cut Gideon off. "It was nothing."

The kor and Tazri cast sidelong scowls at the merfolk. So she was the wild card then. Good to know.

"It was a lot more than nothing for a lot of people," Gideon said. He was looking at Jace, but addressing the room at large. "Every soldier who battled for Sea Gate gave it their all. And many were lost in the pursuit." He paused for a moment and both the human and kor bowed their heads reverently; the merfolk wild card did not. "But we came out victorious. We secured this city." He shook his head. "And then we heard the news. So now we're readjusting the plan. An all-out assault on the titan. An assault that has a much higher likelihood of success now that you're here. The hedrons," Gideon pressed. "How can we harness their power?"

"The hedrons." Jace exhaled. This was where it got slightly tricky.

"We don't need the hedrons. I have a bident and an army of sea creatures," the wild-card merfolk said.

Jace ignored her and focused on information deployment. “The scholars here at Sea Gate were on the right track when working toward harnessing the hedrons’ power to wield against the Eldrazi. But it’s not individual hedrons we need, we—”

“What we need is to get moving,” the merfolk interrupted, waving her annoyingly long seafood fork. “I’ll lead the charge. If you’d all just follow me, we could be halfway through killing Ulamog by now.”

“That would be extremely ill-advised,” Jace said. “If you run out haphazardly, you’ll be the ones who end up being killed.”

The merfolk leaned in. “No offense, Jace is it? But your mystique and mental tricks aren’t going to work on me. My mind is my own, and I know what I’m doing.”

“If I wanted to use mental—” Jace stopped himself. Letting his temper get the best of him would not serve him well right now. “I have no intention of using my *mystique* on you or anyone here...”

“Kiora,” the merfolk supplied. “Remember that name. Soon, all of Zendikar will know it.”

“Kiora,” Jace said. Delusional. She was completely delusional. *Careful*. Fine, he would be careful, but he still had to get his point across. “Am I to assume you’ve had previous occasion to use that weapon to destroy something of this scale?”

“You can’t imagine the things this weapon has been used to do.” Kiora twirled the bident.

“And you’ve been the one to use it to do those things?” Jace pressed. He knew evasion when he heard it.

“I wield it now, that’s all that matters.” Kiora shifted. Not uncomfortably, but restlessly. “And I’m ready for the attack. Come on.” She waved to the others.

“Listen,” Jace said to the room at large. “The titan that we’re dealing with is an incomprehensible being, wielding forces the rest of us can only tangentially perceive. It’s threatening the very existence of this world. In order to stop it, we’re going to have to use a lot more than just one physical weapon—no matter how powerful. I’ll need everyone in here and everyone out there,” he waved toward the Zendikari out the window, “to help build and execute the trap I intend to—”

“Trap?” Nissa, who had been hanging back, stood up straight. Her ears tilted and her glowing green eyes pierced Jace. “You said trap.”

“I did.” Jace nodded. “One hedron alone isn’t enough, but a complex network of hedrons can be aligned to bind the titan so it can’t cause any more destruction. Once we trap it—”

“No.” Nissa pounded her staff into the ground.



Art by Cynthia Sheppard

Oh, good. More antagonism. Jace was on a roll.

“We do not trap it,” Nissa’s voice resonated with power. “The titans have been trapped here for too long. The world has been in pain for too long.”

“The trap wouldn’t be permanent,” Jace said. Why hadn’t he started with that? “Once we trap it, we’ll figure out how to destroy it. I have some ideas—”

“As I said, I already know how to kill the titan.” Kiora brandished her bident and strode to the window. “Coming?” She looked to Nissa. What did she plan to do, jump out?

Nissa nodded. “Zendikar and I will battle alongside you.”

“Uh, sure, Zendikar. Great. Anyone else?” Kiora blinked at the room with four eyelids.

“I go where the battle is,” the vampire said.

“Enough!” Gideon stepped up. “I gave my orders, and—”

“And we’re following them,” Kiora said. “For the most part.” She winked, taking hold of the window ledge; she really was going to jump out.

“I order you to stand down,” Gideon said. “All of you.”

“You can’t just go out there and launch your own attack,” the kor chimed in.

“Why not?” Kiora asked.

“Because,” Jace blurted, “any assault on the titan that does not destroy it runs the risk of driving it off of Zendikar entirely and onto another world.”

“Sounds good to me. I say, ‘Good riddance.’” Kiora extended her arm out the window and the thick tentacle of an octopus rose up to meet her. “Coming?” She signaled Nissa.

But Nissa hesitated, looking to Jace. “Onto another world?”

“Yes.” Jace nodded solemnly. “And we won’t know which one.” He glanced to Kiora. “But wherever it goes, it will ravage that world, too. The people and the land will be destroyed. And once it has finished, it will find yet another plane. It will do this again and again for eternity. Unless it ends here.”

“And it will.” Kiora slid onto the tentacle.

Please. Jace reached out to Kiora’s mind. *You don’t want to do this.*

Both Kiora and Gideon moved so fast that Jace didn’t realize what was happening until he was on the floor, pushed by Gideon’s thick arm, and Gideon was deflecting the strike of Kiora’s bident meant for Jace.

“And you don’t want to do that,” Kiora spat. “Ever again.” The tentacle lowered out the window, taking the wild-card merfolk with it.



Kiora, Master of the Depths | Art by Jason Chan

“We have to stop her,” Jace scrambled to his feet. “We have to—”

“No.” Gideon stepped in front of the window. “We are wasting time that we can’t afford to waste. The titan is approaching, and we must prepare. We will build the trap, and once we have secured our target, we will launch our offensive as planned. We both trap it and destroy it. Any questions?” Standing in the middle of the room, Gideon seemed to fill it, leaving no room for debate.

“Good. We must act quickly. Jace, my army is at your disposal, use them as you need to build the trap. Nissa, accompany Jace, assist him in any way you can. Munda, Jori, see to the patrols. We will need more sentries. The titan will not be traveling alone, and we must ensure that our perimeter is secure. And that means from a certain merfolk as well. Don’t allow Kiora to interfere with what we’re about to do. General Tazri, Drana, you will come with me to speak to the army. We need to ready our troops.”

“Yes, sir.” The sentiment was echoed around the room, and Jace didn’t realize he had said it until he heard his own voice in the mix. It surprised him. Gideon surprised him. The Planeswalker had grown quite a bit as a leader since Jace had left him at Sky Rock. That was good. They would need a strong leader for what they were about to do.

As the others filed out, Jace turned to Nissa. “I’m glad you stayed.”

She made no attempt to respond.

All right, so it was all business then. Jace could do that. “So I hear you can move the land.”

Hours later, Nissa reached into the land, feeling out yet another buried hedron. She gently coaxed the earth down to push the rock upward. Even though she couldn’t see the hedron, she knew where it was, she knew precisely what space within Zendikar it occupied. And even though she couldn’t see the titan, she knew he was there. During the course of the night, while they had worked to assemble Jace’s trap, Nissa had sensed Ulamog move into the bay at Sea Gate. He was coming toward them through the water. And when the sun rose, they would all be able to see him, towering over them. Just waiting to be destroyed.



Nissa’s Renewal | Art by Lius Lasahido

She looked to Ashaya, her elemental, her closest friend, and Zendikar’s soul. “It’s almost time.”

Ashaya’s resolve flooded through Nissa, as together they pried the hedron out of the ground and rested it on one of its long, angular sides.

Nissa paced around the immense rock, running her hand over its surface. She was looking for cracks, blemishes, or chips. But just like all the others they had excavated that night, it had been perfectly preserved. These hedrons were not only powerful, they were powerfully built. Robust enough to withstand the channeling of the full might of this world, Jace had assured her of that.

And if somehow he was wrong, or if the hedrons failed, then Nissa would be ready.

Zendikar would be ready as well. Ashaya rested her enormous hand on Nissa’s shoulder.

Nissa looked up into her elemental’s familiar wooden facade. “You know I would not allow the titan to be trapped here again if there was any other way.” She paused. “Or if I had any doubt.”

Ashaya knew. Zendikar understood.

Unspoken between them was a second part of that understanding: Both Nissa and Zendikar wanted this to end here and now, and they wanted to be the ones to end it. They did not want to chase the titan away; they wanted to face it.

The land swelled with a hunger that would not be sated unless it was given the chance to confront its enemy, to fight, and to destroy it. Zendikar was more powerful than the monster that plagued it, and today the world would prove its strength.



Ashaya, the Awoken World | Art by Raymond Swanland

Nissa exhaled. “Let’s finish what we started.”

Together they moved the hedron to the edge of the bluff where Gideon and Jace stood with a team of kor and an inordinate amount of rope.

“Good, good. Bring it in here.” Gideon directed Nissa and Ashaya between two lines of rope. “Get it tied up and secure,” he instructed the kor.

“This one is going to slide in right between these two.” Jace was talking to Munda, pointing at a glowing blue illusion that hung in the air before them. The illusion was a scale model of the hedron ring that was being constructed out over the water. Nissa didn’t understand why the mind-mage Planeswalker insisted on trusting this synthetic entity of his own creation, one with so many possibilities for inaccuracies, when the genuine ring was right there in front of him. With his head bent over the illusion, Jace was missing the magnificent sight.

“It really is beautiful,” Nissa whispered up to Ashaya. The elemental agreed.

The hedrons had begun to glow when the first two had been linked. Now the runes carved into the surfaces of the rocks shimmered with power in a connected pattern that elicited memories of the first time Nissa had received visions from Zendikar.

This was not the only way in which this night had come to feel like a culmination for Nissa. It was as though everything she had been doing her whole life, all that she had worked for, had led to this. She had made a vow long ago, a promise to Zendikar, and this was her chance to make good on her words.

“Steady...steady!” Munda’s sharp call drew Nissa’s attention. “Release the counterweight.”

Nissa and Ashaya watched as a team of four kor and humans, who were stationed on a nearby floating rock, lowered a thick slab that was attached via a pulley system to the hedron. As the counterweight descended, the hedron rose toward the ring.

“Careful now—that’s good,” Gideon paced on the bluff. Nissa could sense his disquiet; he wanted to be out there pulling, lifting, pushing—he wanted to be out there doing everything, always. She smiled; she was grateful that Gideon had come to Zendikar.



Gideon’s Reproach | Art by Dan Scott

“All right.” Gideon signaled to a third team of kor who lined the seawall. “Gate team, pull!”

The team heaved and the hedron drifted horizontally through the air. It looked like a dark cloud, though Nissa could hear the creaking of the ropes and pulleys that supported it. Here and there were flashes of light, spells to help prod the massive rock into place.

Jace glanced between his illusion and reality, constantly checking to see if the hedron was in place. Nissa didn’t need to see the illusion; she knew when it was right. “There it is,” she whispered to Ashaya.

“There it is!” Jace’s cry echoed her words.

“And—halt it there!” Gideon shouted.

This part of the process worked seamlessly now; the first time they had done it, it had taken some coaxing and a lot of back and forth. But now the three teams knew exactly what to do. They pulled and tightened their ropes in opposite directions, slowing the hedron to a gentle stop. When it reached the perfect alignment, it let them know, all but snapping into place.

Gideon eyed Jace. “How does it look?”

“Perfect,” Nissa said under her breath.

Jace studied his illusion for a bit longer. “Placement’s good. Altitude’s good. I’d say it’s good.”

“Told you,” Nissa smiled up at Ashaya.

“Good,” Gideon said. “First team, prepare your lines for the final move.” He turned to Nissa. “We only need one more.”

“And you’ll have it.” She reached out into the land, feeling around the pockmarked bluff for another hedron. It was possible that they would have to go out to the next cliffside—

“Eyes on! Eyes on!” The sudden outburst came from the trees ahead. Nissa started, reaching for her blade as one of the airborne sentries, an elf rider mounted on a manta, flew in.



Skyrider Elf | Art by Dan Scott

“Seble!” Gideon called up, his sural already drawn. “What is it?”

“Movement in the trees that way!” Seble called down. “My guess is some spawn.”

“Take another pass,” Gideon said. “I need to know how many and how big.” He looked to Nissa.

She nodded, gripping the hilt of her sword. She was ready to move in. With the approach of the titan, they all knew there would be more spawn; it was only a matter of time before one breached their borders. Nissa kept her eyes on the circling elf, watching her reaction.

Seble came back around, shaking her head. “I think it was a false alarm,” she called down.

“If you heard it, it was out there,” Gideon said. “I trust you. One more pass.” He gestured with his finger in a circle.

Seble took one more lap, but Nissa knew what the elf would say as she came back around.

“Negative,” she called down. “There’s nothing out there but a bunch of charred ground. Looks like it might have been an old camp or something. No sign of spawn or corruption.”

“All right. Circle up with the other sentries. I want a full perimeter check,” Gideon called up. “And call in another skyrider.”

“Will do.” Seble turned to fly out, but suddenly she cried out and reined her manta back.

Nissa instinctively fell into a defensive battle stance.

“What do you see?” Gideon called up. “Where is it?”

Wordlessly, Seble pointed ahead.

Nissa followed the elf’s finger. And that’s when she saw the titan.

Ulamog, the bringer of destruction.



Ulamog, the Ceaseless Hunger | Art by Michael Komarck

The first hint of light had dawned over the horizon, illuminating the Eldrazi’s towering form.

In that moment, Nissa almost jumped out onto the nearest floating rock, swung from the vine that dangled not too far beyond that, and launched herself straight at the titan. She had her sword, she had the might of her hatred, and now she had an opening.

But she stopped herself. Zendikar had paid the price for her recklessness once before. This titan was out here ravaging the land because she had released it from its bonds. This world and these people had been slaughtered because she had acted rashly. She would not let that happen again. This time she would do things the right way. Trap him first and then destroy him.

She steadied her breathing and forced herself to sheath her sword. The time would come. She looked to Ashaya. “We need another hedron.”

It was as difficult for the elemental to turn away from the titan as it was for Nissa, but Ashaya did turn, and she strode down the craggy rock. Nissa kept pace at the elemental’s side, reaching out into the land as she went, searching for the final piece of Jace’s puzzle.

Jace liked to think that every puzzle had more than one solution. It was limiting to believe otherwise, and naive to assume that a puzzle’s creator could have accounted for every possible solution and then eliminated every path to each of those solutions except one. Yet, he had not found so much as the hint of even one more solution to the puzzle before him; so far as he could tell, there was only one way to trap Ulamog. Jace was unaccustomed to working without contingency plans. It made him antsy.

Every shout from a sentry had Jace on edge, scanning the water for Kiora and her army of sea creatures—yet another variable he had not had time to adequately account for. But fortunately each shout proved to be nothing more than an alert to Tazri and her defense squad of another wave of approaching spawn. Jace half laughed to himself; he had just considered a wave of spawn a fortunate occurrence.

He fiddled with the three-dimensional illusion diagram that floated in front of him, keeping his head down, averting his gaze from reality. He knew what was there. He had seen it once. And the stale air, the crashing waves, and the sounds of gnashing tentacles were enough to confirm that the titan was no more than a stone's throw away from where Jace stood on a floating rock. There was no reason to look up.

Besides, there was a miniature version of Ulamog right there in his hands. He had made an illusion of the titan to go with the illusion of the hedron ring. He advanced his Ulamog forward, illusory bifurcated arms flailing, through the opening in the hedron ring. Once the titan was inside, Jace moved the little kor, humans, and elves to pull on the ropes and swing the hedron door into place. The door was made of three linked hedrons that were effectively hinged to one side of the opening in the ring. All the tiny people had to do was guide the door into place so that it would close the ring. When they did that—as he made them do now—the ring of hedrons flared to life with a bright blue light and the titan was trapped inside.

Good.

Again.

Jace wiped the illusion away and made a new one. This time he brought Ulamog in at an angle, creating a modest challenge. The miniature people had to spin the ring so the door was aligned with the titan's path.

Good.

Again.

This time he increased the speed of the titan, something that wasn't a probable occurrence in reality, but he had to account for what variables he could.

Good.

Again.

He half-heartedly doubled the size of the titan. They'd have to widen the door.

Jace sighed. This was absurd. It would never happen in reality. His exercise was becoming pointless. He had run it a dozen times, more. The alternative? Looking up. But looking up meant looking at the very real and very life-size version of his illusion. Looking up meant seeing the real faces of the little glowing figures. One of the elves was Nissa. One of the merfolk was Jori En. And standing on a floating rock in front of the hedron ring would be another figure, one that Jace hadn't incorporated into his simulation because that figure had no bearing on whether or not the ring would be completed successfully. That figure was merely there to, in his own words, "stand between Sea Gate and the titan in case something goes wrong." That figure was Gideon.



Gideon, Ally of Zendikar | Art by Eric Deschamps

Jace looked up.

There he was, standing alone in front of Zendikar's last civilization, the brazen combat mage who had come to Ravnica near death to beseech Jace for help. Another time, another place. Jace couldn't have predicted this outcome when he had dropped Liliana's rose on the street and followed the sweating, bleeding man. Now here they were, about to attempt a stunt that had previously taken three extremely powerful Planeswalkers decades to accomplish.

And yet, Jace thought they could do it.

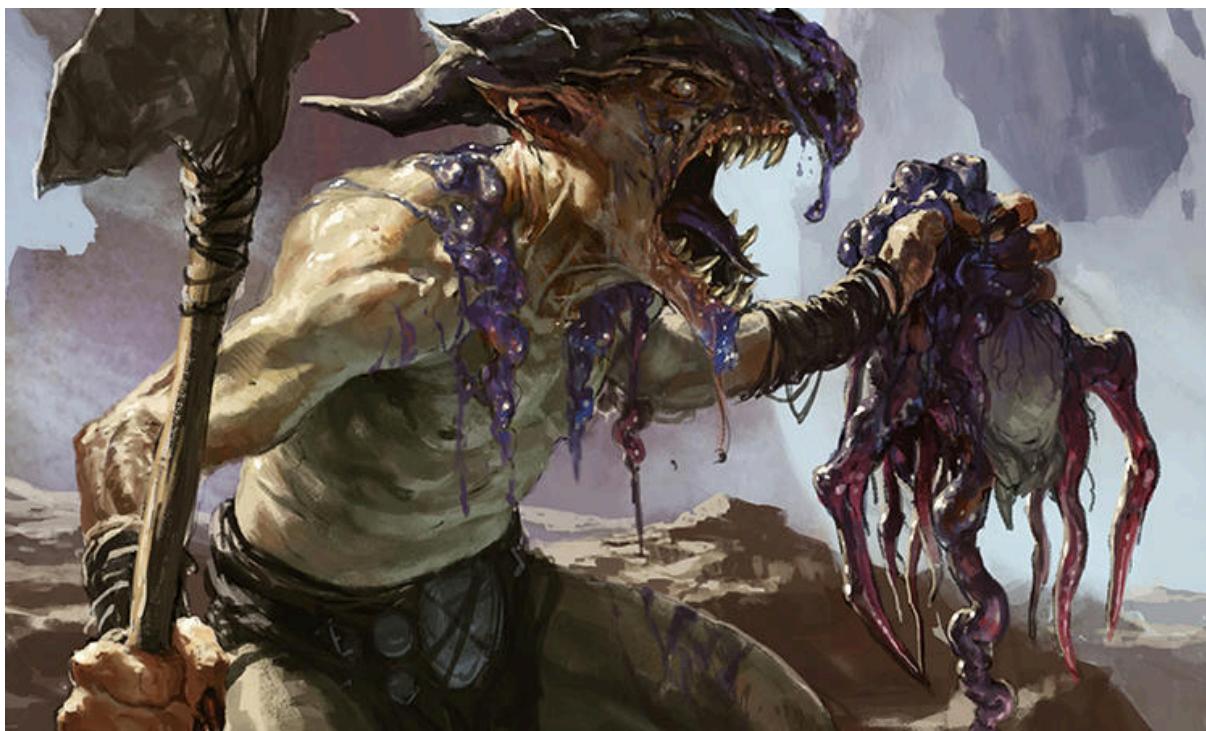
The titan was there, the ring was assembled, and...Jace looked from Gideon back to the hedrons just in time to see the Zendikari make some last-second adjustments to the positioning of the door as Ulamog lurched through.

A cheer rose up from the rope teams stationed around the hedrons.

It was almost too easy—almost.

"Hold it steady!" Gideon's deep voice boomed above the cheers. He lashed his sural at one of Ulamog's tentacles, sending it back inside the ring. The entirety of the titan's front half and most of its tentacles had moved inside the trap, but the bony plates on its back had not yet crossed the threshold. Just a little farther.

All around the titan were masses of scions and spawn of its brood. They moved faster than their sire and had descended on Sea Gate first. But Gideon's army had been there to head them off, and the Zendikari forces were still staunchly battling now. The fortified seawall remained untouched. Jace had to admit that he was impressed by the force Gideon had assembled. And he was impressed by the Zendikari themselves. None of them had chosen to evacuate even after seeing Ulamog on the horizon, not one.



Goblin War Paint | Art by Karl Kopinski

They were a capable army, and Gideon was an adept leader. Which didn't mean that he wasn't also a fool. Nothing but a foolhardy notion could have precipitated his decision to stand there on that rock mere feet from the titan's bony faceplate.

"In! He's in!" The cry was audible even above the cacophony of crashing waves, snapping bones, and slicing weapons.

Jace confirmed the assertion; yes, the titan had moved into place.

"Let's close it up!" Munda, the kor who often fought at Gideon's side, was the one who had shouted the order. "Hatch team, heave!"

The team, which included Nissa and Jori, pulled on their ropes and cast their spells, easing the hedron door into place. But it moved so slowly!

Jace's hands fluttered around his illusion, flicking the illusory door closed and open, closed and open. Each time the ring lit up and the miniature Ulamog was trapped. "Come on. Come on."

He looked to Gideon, who was now face to face with the titan. What did the other man expect to accomplish up there? He had to know that he wouldn't be able to stop Ulamog alone. If the plan failed, if the trap didn't work, then Gideon would just be the first of the army to be reduced to dust.

Ulamog lurched closer, bifurcated arms thrashing, reaching toward Gideon. Gideon wielded his sural, slashing one knobby blue arm back and then another. He did not once step back; rather he moved forward on the rock, closer to the titan. What must he be thinking right now, staring straight at Ulamog's blank faceplate, seeing the monster that didn't see him? What must that feel like? Jace was not at all tempted to actually find out.

Unable to watch any longer, he traced the line of hedrons back around to the door. The team had almost completed the ring. Finally! He compared it to his illusion. Just a few more inches...

"Yes! There!" Nissa cried from her position dangling from a hanging vine.

Her declaration surprised Jace. Was she right? He glanced between the illusion and the actual ring, studying the two, comparing the placement. It appeared the elf was correct. But without the diagram, how...

“Jace!” Gideon called. “Are we good?” His voice wasn’t at all strained, an auditory contradiction to the strain on his face as he pushed against Ulamog’s bony chin extension. “Can they lock it in?”

Right. They were supposed to wait for Jace to tell them the assembly matched the diagram. “Yes! That’s it. Lock it in!”

“Lock it in!” Munda echoed Jace’s call.

In response, three kor rappelled down the side of the hedron that had temporarily acted as a doorframe and secured the final connection. As the kor cinched their ropes into place, Nissa provided a spell to nudge the hedron into perfect alignment, and...Jace held his breath. The light. Where was the light?

The ring didn’t flare to life like it was supposed to.

And the titan wasn’t contained within its bounds.

Gideon ducked under another of Ulamog’s swinging tentacles. “Are we there yet?”

“Why isn’t it glowing?” Munda called.

Jace blinked down to the simulation still floating above his palm. He opened and closed the illusory door. His ring glowed. He looked between the illusion and the real ring. Why wasn’t it glowing? He bounced on the balls of his feet. What was he missing?

“Something is out of place!” Nissa called down to him. She was running her hands along the hedron closest to her. She pressed her cheek to the side of the massive rock. “There’s a misalignment.”

Was she right? Based on her demonstrated capabilities, which Jace admittedly did not fully understand, should he just assume she was right? At the very least, he should eliminate her possibility before moving on. He had nothing better to go on. His eyes tracked from his diagram to the ring, marking off one hedron at a time. *Yes...yes...yes...* Each one was where it was supposed to be—and yet.

“I think it’s coming from over there!” Nissa pointed toward the hedrons nearest Sea Gate.

How did—Jace twisted the illusion around 90 degrees. What did she see that he didn’t? He had done all the calculations. He had measured the alignment.

“Jace!” Gideon cried. “What can you tell me?” The massive man bobbed under Ulamog’s arm and slashed at the titan’s bony chest plate.

Jace ran his hand through his hair. This was on him. Gideon’s life. The fate of Zendikar. This was the puzzle he had come here to solve, but he didn’t have the solution. He had no idea which hedron it was, or if it even was a hedron that was out of place. He sent the illusion spinning. And Nissa caught it as she landed on the floating rock next to him.

“What—” Jace staggered back.

“I can tell it is coming from that side,” she said. She had to yell above the sounds of water and war even though they were standing right next to each other. “I cannot tell which one it is, though, not from this distance. I would have to see the whole assembly at once, all of the connections. I would have to go up there onto the bluff, but—”

“There’s no time for that,” Jace finished for her.

“Correct.” Nissa’s glowing green eyes bored into him. “But I think there is another way. A more expedient way.” She pointed to the illusion. “This synthetic energy diagram will allow us to see.”

“What do you mean?”

“How confident are you that there are no inaccuracies?”

“In my illusion?”

“May I see it?” She touched her head. “From in here.”

Was she inviting him into her mind?

A cry from over her shoulder, and Jace glanced up in time to see a kor struck by one of Ulamog’s rear tentacles and sent plummeting.

Nissa didn’t turn around. She rested her hand on Jace’s shoulder, drawing his gaze back to her magnetic eyes. “If there is a way to identify the misalignment, we must act quickly. If you do not allow me to do this, then I will have no choice but to confront the titan and attempt to destroy him without the trap. I don’t want to have do that.”

Jace shook his head. “And I don’t want you to have to do that either.”

“Then we agree,” Nissa said.

All right then. Into the elf’s mind. Jace exhaled and looked into Nissa’s wild, green eyes...and then out of them.

It was as though the whole world was afire—if fire was green. At first Jace thought the hedron ring had finally lit up, but then he realized that it wasn’t the circle itself that was glowing. It was the web of leylines that ran between each pair of hedrons. The lines crisscrossed in an intricate pattern too complex to reduce to a simple equation—or to an equation at all...

The pattern lit up the space above the sea, but the hedrons were not the only things that were glowing, far from it. Everything. Everything was connected to something else by a line of power. The Zendikari holding the ropes, Gideon widening his stance before the titan, the skyrider’s manta beating its wings overhead, the tree to his right, the rock at his feet. There was too much to process, too much to parse.

Jace’s mind spun. He lost his grip and began to fall out of Nissa’s mind. He tried to hold on, but how was he supposed to know what to hold on to?

Hold on here. It was Nissa’s voice, and with it came what felt like a cradle of support. How was she doing this? Jace gripped the invisible hand and he did not fall out.

Focus, she said. *Focus on one thing at a time.* She directed his attention down to his illusory diagram.

Jace breathed deeply, concentrating on that one thing, just the illusion. He could still see the chaos of the leylines in his periphery, but he ignored it.

Good, Nissa said. She reached out to touch the illusion. *May I?*

Why not? They had come this far. *Yes.*

Nissa pinched two sides of the hedron circle and picked up the illusion. Jace allowed her mind to guide it while his maintained the form. She pulled outward, opening her arms and stretching the illusion, widening the ring and growing the hedrons.

You’ve made all the calculations? she said. *You are relatively confident it is correct?*

Yes, Jace said. *I’m very confident that everything is where it should be, but—*

Then this will work. Nissa launched the illusion out over the sea, expanding it as she did, sending it toward the real ring of hedrons.

Her control of it was shaky and awkward, but Jace understood immediately what she was trying to do. His heart leapt. Brilliant. He took control, deftly directing the illusion into place, expertly growing it until it was life-size, making each of the illusory hedrons as large as its stone counterpart. Nissa didn't know how to line them up, but he did. Each of them found its match—except one.

There. Nissa said, noting it at the same time that Jace did. The hedron was tilted; it must have shifted sometime after being carefully locked into place.

We have to— Jace began, but Nissa was already gone, leaping toward the out-of-place hedron. She released his mind as she sprang off the rock—she released his mind, not the other way around. She didn't exactly kick him out, but he didn't think he could have stayed if he had wanted to. That was a powerful thing. This elf was powerful.

Jace staggered on his own two feet, looking out of his own two eyes at a dull world. The web was gone, the connections had vanished. The chaos had faded away. It was as much a relief as a disappointment. It was an odd feeling to know that there was so little—of the leylines, of the world—that he could actually see.

The only thing Gideon could see was jagged, white bone: Ulamog's thick faceplate. The titan was too close; the trap should have stopped him by now, he should have been contained. But something had gone wrong.

Gideon had been preparing himself for this moment since the first time he had heard Jace explain the plan. He had believed it would work, he had trusted the mind mage—and he still did—but he had always known that there was a possibility that something would go wrong. Jace had known it too. That's why Gideon had stationed himself here on this rock. He was the last line of defense. He stood between Sea Gate and Ulamog, and he would hold his position for as long as it took them to set the trap.

And if they couldn't set it, if it came to it, then Gideon would call for an evacuation. And he would hold the titan back until his army could get to safety. But it wasn't time for that yet. He could hold out a little longer. They just needed a little longer...

One of Ulamog's tentacles soared through the air, aimed right at Gideon. Whorls of invulnerability erupted over his skin in anticipation of the collision.

Gideon absorbed the blow, gritting his teeth under the weight of it. A second tentacle hurtled his way from the other side. He shifted the focus of his protection.

How much longer should he wait? He slashed back Ulamog's reaching fingers. Just a little longer...

The titan leaned forward, bearing down toward Gideon. Gideon dug his feet into the rock and stared straight into where he imagined the titan's eyes would be. "You're not getting past me." He turned his shoulder to meet Ulamog's chest, focusing all of his power into that single point, the point of impact. He grounded himself, clenching every muscle in his body, pushing back.

It was as though the weight of an entire world was being driven against him.

He felt his feet begin to slip. Was it time? He opened his mouth to give the order, but then closed it. He could hold out just a little longer. They needed just a little longer...

Gideon squeezed his eyes shut, exhaling a roaring cry with the effort.

He was losing ground.

Then suddenly a blue flash lit up the inside of his eyelids, and the pressure on his shoulder vanished.

Gideon stumbled forward with the momentum stored up from the force he had been exerting on the titan. He caught himself just before he tumbled off the front of the floating rock...which meant there was nothing else in front of him to stop his fall. He was no longer standing face-to-face with the titan.

Ulamog had been pulled within the bounds of the hedron prison—and the prison was glowing, glowing a brilliant blue. The gleam flooded Sea Gate, drowning out the shadow of the great Eldrazi.



Aligned Hedron Network | Art by Richard Wright

“Ha!” Gideon thrust his sural in the air. They had done it. Ulamog was trapped.

A cheer rose up from behind him as Nissa landed gracefully on the rock next to him, letting a dangling vine recoil behind her. “We did it,” she said.

“We did it,” Gideon agreed, his eyes connecting with Jace’s across the sea. “We did it.”

From his station atop a cliffside, Ebi whooped a cheer. They had done it. The titan. Ulamog. Trapped. Ebi staggered back, tears in his eyes. There was still hope. There was still a chance to save this world.

A cry echoed up from the Zendikari below, and Ebi lent his voice to theirs. “For Zendikar!” As he raised his fist in the air, a shadow fell over him. Before he could look up, a demon landed on the rock in front of him.

Ebi swung his weapon, but the demon caught his arm in midair. “It’s unfortunate, but it seems that you’re in the wrong place at the wrong time.” The demon pushed Ebi up against the rock face behind him, its thick black hand around Ebi’s neck.

Ebi tried to call out. He had to warn the others. He was a sentry. Gideon was counting on him.



Demon's Grasp | Art by David Gaillet

“Shhh.” The demon squeezed. Ebi could feel his life draining away. “Take what solace you can in the knowledge that you will not be here to witness Zendikar’s demise.”

The world went black.