

New Capenna: The Fall of Park Heights

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From set *March of the Machine*

Flowers hung from the ceiling, strung like chandeliers, perfuming the room with the aroma of exotic blooms. Freshly polished statues glistened in the lowlight and music carried their feet across the floor . . . but nothing shone as beautifully as her.

The gathered Maestros—friends and family—were all held in a thrall. Strings hummed over loving whispers and quiet, happy tears. They were surrounded by everything and everyone they'd ever cared about and yet the only thing that Errant saw was Parnesse.

She was Errant's muse. Every breath and brushstroke that lay ahead.

And her wife's smile as they glided across the dance floor? It outshone the brightest spotlight. It was more perfect than anything Errant's hand could ever hope to capture in ink. They made their next turn and Errant leaned in, brushing her nose against Parnesse's. She let out a soft giggle. The world was perfect.

Then, a shadow fell over New Capenna.

A glass of wine spilled across the floor, the red liquid flowing unnaturally into the shape of a near complete circle with a line drawn through its center. She had seen that symbol before, many times, in the exhibits of the museum. But what was it doing here, now? Errant's feet stumbled and, when she turned again, the loving eyes of their friends and family had changed.

Rivulets of black oil dripped down their cheeks. Red sinew crept over their bodies like the vines of an invasive plant. Reaching. Grasping. Stringing together pale, jagged plates. Their expressions had transformed, too—mouths hung open with broad, too happy grins underneath hungry eyes. Join us, they urged without words. Be one with us. The celebration was no longer about Errant and Parnesse. It was now for the twisted union of all of them, condensing into the singularity of one being.



Art by: Aurore Folny

Even her father, Anhelo, had been transformed.

Errant stumbled. She pulled Parnesse closer.

“Darling?” Her wife was oblivious. Was she not seeing what Errant was? Did she not feel the ominous miasma that had replaced the aroma of flowers? “What’s wrong?”

“We have to go.”

“Go, where?” Parnesse slowed to a stop, cupping Errant’s cheek. “It’s our union day. Why would we leave?”

“Can you not see—” Errant was interrupted by a low rumbling in the distance that heralded death and war. The sky streaked with crimson that tore the budding stars asunder. Plated branches shot through the openings from other planes and sunk into the foundations of New Capenna. Without warning, the roof of the Maestro’s museum was ripped clean off, cast aside—a present coming undone at the hands of an overeager child.

Errant stared up in horror at the monster that loomed over a crumbling, distorting New Capenna. Atraxa was larger than life. Her pale wings stretched so wide that they could touch each end of New Capenna’s once proud barrier.

With a clawed hand, she slowly reached forward. Parnesse let out a scream. Errant twisted, ready to protect her wife, make their escape, and—

She jolted from the squalid corner of the abandoned train station she and Parnesse had holed up in to tend their wounds and briefly rest. Errant hadn’t intended to fall asleep. But stealing from under the noses of the Phyrexian invaders had taken a lot out of them. They’d paid in blood to make it out alive.

Parnesse’s scream still rang in her ears. Unfortunately, it hadn’t come entirely from the nightmare.

Their pursuer had caught up with them.

The crash of a Phyrexian converter beast plunging through the wall had shattered their brief reprieve. It was the size of one of the small streetcars that would’ve ferried passengers in and out of this destroyed station not long ago. The dust and rubble settled on the beast’s spined back. Sharp injectors at

the ends of its tails cast ominous shadows in the haze. Glistening oil, black and shimmering, dripped from its extended maw between razor-sharp teeth.

Errant had been maneuvering through the city for some time now but she'd always used pathways marked as safe and secret passages. This mission was the first time she'd seen one of New Capenna's infiltrators up close. These were the monsters that were responsible for the downfall of the Maestros and all the brutality that had followed. *Her father*. Errant's throat went tight, and her blood ran cold. Her only thought was shoving one of the softly clanking charges in her bag into that massive maw. It wouldn't be the revenge she deserved for all she'd lost. But it'd be a start.

Parnesse's hand closed around hers, scattering Errant from her vicious fantasies. "We have to get these back to the crew!"

"But you—"

"I'm *fine*," Parnesse interrupted her, though she still had her hand pressed to her bloodied thigh. She had been caught on a twisted railing during their initial escape. "I'll be in a lot worse shape if that thing gets us."

"Right." Errant spun, holding onto Parnesse. The two heavy satchels that were laden with the explosives they had stolen from an old Riveteer's stash in the Mezzio clanked against her hips as they broke into a sprint.

The two of them were off and so was the monster chasing them. They danced around the back, collapsed wall of the streetcar station, and emerged out onto a high track that soared over the Mezzio, tangling with the branches of the Invasion Tree that seemed to grow by the day.

New Capenna was a shell of its former glory. The gilded halls of Park Heights were now tarnished and dim. The bright colors and effervescent life of the Mezzio had been replaced with the matte grays of the ashes of war.

Ever since the Phyrexians returned, the city's defenders had been fighting a losing battle. They were refugees in their own home, running from place to place as chaos reigned. There wasn't an hour that went by where smoke didn't billow up from some collapsing or burned-out structure. Not an hour that flashes of magic weren't bursting out in the night as New Capenna's citizens fought back with increasing futility. There wasn't even time to mourn the dead and dying in the streets.

The converter beast plunged through the rubble behind them, shaking the railing. Parnesse wobbled, her wounded leg almost giving out. Errant held fast onto her. Her wife's face was dangerously pale. Parnesse's trail of blood was no doubt how the converter beast had tracked them.

"Can you manage running on the rails?" Errant shouted, even though Parnesse was still within arm's reach. The thunderous noise of the beast's claws raking against the metal railing nearly drowned out her words.

"Just go!"

The vibrations of the Phyrexian's footfalls hummed through the soles of Errant's boots as she led Parnesse down the curve of the railing. Up ahead was another abandoned streetcar station, the archway the railings disappeared under decorated with painted swirls and sharp edges. Hidden in the graffiti was tagger's scrawl—a symbolic language of long forgotten origin, but well remembered by those who made the streets their home.

Danger, the symbols read. Errant shifted and leaped for a nearby building ledge. She spun, extending her hands back to her wife. Her stomach was in her throat as Parnesse jumped, relying mostly on her

good leg. Errant caught and pulled her close, helping Parnesse catch her breath and her footing before they followed the green markings along the building to safety.

The beast tried to make the jump, but the ledge was too narrow. It sunk its claws into the building, trying to find purchase and ripping chunks of steel and cement in the process. But it couldn't get a solid grip and tumbled to the street below, landing with a heavy *thud* and a plume of dust.

If only a fall like that was enough to kill a Phyrexian. Errant didn't let up her pace. The beast was dazed, and they had to make use of the opportunity to slip away.

She glanced over at Parnesse, eyes dropping to her wife's thigh. Parnesse favored her unwounded leg but was keeping up without issue. Errant tried to hide her worry. "You look like a regular tagger who just marked up enforcer turf."

"I'll prefer my studio, thank you!" Parnesse panted.

Errant's art was better sprayed across the side of a building. Running from a converter beast wasn't much different than running from Broker enforcers. At least, that's what she told herself to keep her head level and footing sure.

Around a corner, across three balconies, and down a fire escape they slowed their pace in a lower alley — sides burning and chests heaving. Parnesse leaned against the wall, grabbing both her knees. Errant scanned for any other signs of tagger's scrawl, but there were none. Whoever had highlighted the route they'd followed had ended their graffiti here.

"How are you holding up?" Errant said softly. There was so much blood soaking through the haphazard bandages she'd wrapped around Parnesse's thigh a mere hour ago. "It opened up again."

"We need to keep going."

"Let me just" Errant knelt and ripped off her other sleeve.

Parnesse rested her hand on Errant's shoulder. "The meeting point isn't much farther now."

"It's far enough." Errant tied her sleeve tightly around her wife's thigh, finishing the knot with frustration burning the back of her throat. She had sworn to keep Parnesse safe. But all she'd managed to do was have her charging headfirst into danger. "Perhaps you could find a hiding spot and stay—"

"With those things out here?" Parnesse cocked her head to the side.

"You have a point." Errant stood and started down the alley, but a low growl had them both halting in their tracks. A converter beast was perched on a nearby building, just ahead. Looming ominously.

How had it caught up with them?

A roar from behind. Haggard and limping, but still deadly, the first converter beast stalked up the alley, its spines grinding against the buildings. They rippled across its body. Twitching. Ready to take them into the cage on its back and convert them into one of Phyrexia's minions.

"Errant." Parnesse's tone was unnervingly calm. "Options?" She already knew the answer before she asked.

There were no windows around them. No doors they could try and break into. The closest fire escape was beyond reach without a boost. But it was the only chance for one of them.

"I can try and hoist you up there." Errant pointed to the fire escape. "Then I'll draw them to me."

"No."

"I won't let them take you."

"We both know I'm not going to outrun them with my leg like this and you're not going to leave me." Parnesse reached into one of the bags at Errant's hip, placing an explosive packed into the shape of a metal puck into Errant's palm. Her calmness overtook Errant's worry. "Neither of us will be converted."

"It's too close quarters." Errant stared at the small explosive. "Henzie said one of these can take down a small building."

The converter beasts continued stalking forward. Slow and purposeful. Inevitable.

"We made a promise," Parnesse said softly. "*Anything* over becoming one of those things."

Errant met her wife's eyes. Her stomach knotted and a flush of nausea overtook her. How could Parnesse be so calm? She knew what she was suggesting.

"If you see another way, I'd love to hear it." Parnesse wore a defeated smile. They both knew the answer.

Errant grabbed Parnesse's wrist, pulling her in for a fierce but brief kiss. "Throw as far as you can," Errant whispered, amazed her fear and sorrow didn't choke down the words. "I love you until the ink runs dry."

"I love you until every canvas is filled." Parnesse's thumb depressed the small circle in the center of the puck.

Errant mirrored the motion. She wouldn't let Parnesse do this alone. No matter what, they would be together until the last moment.

They both threw and an explosion louder than any that had been heard in days rocked the streets of New Capenna.

"believe "

"would they I don't "

"move!"

"Hang on "

Hang on . The two words stuck with Errant even when everything else had muddled to nothingness.

Sensations returned slowly. A twitch of her fingers. A dull ache in her ribs that quickly faded. Then came the weight of the familiar wool blanket. The smell of the oil and steel shavings from Henzie's tinkering. Kamiz's perfume lingering in the air.

Errant cracked open her eyes. It took several seconds to bring the room into focus. Her paints and sprayers lined the wall. The lighting flickered in the same way it always had—power inconsistent since the Phyrexians had taken control of the city. The crushed metal of the cuff her father had given her before her wedding reflected her face in pieces.

Errant blinked. She'd had the strangest dream. It was her wedding. Something about Atraxa? A mission for the resistance? Converter beasts? She raised a hand to rub her eyes and stopped mid-motion.

Parnesse .

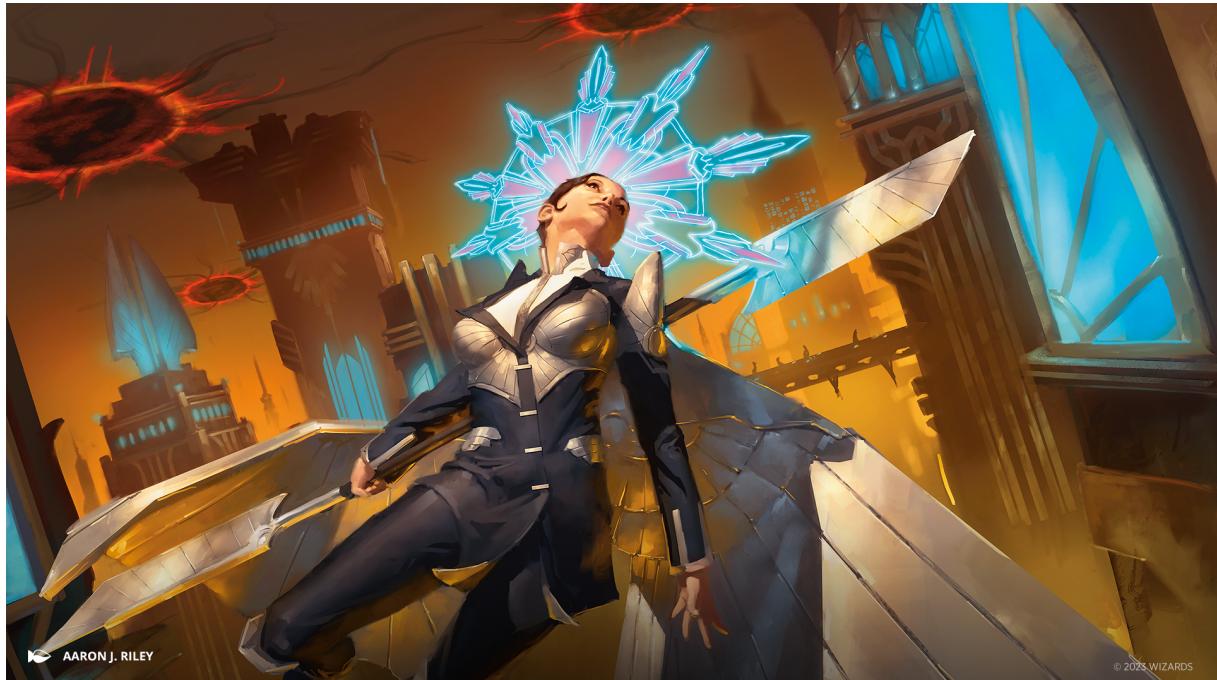
Her hand fell to her side and landed in the vacant spot in the bed where her wife should be. A strangled noise of panic and fear wrested from the depths of her worst nightmares.

Throwing the blanket aside, Errant was on her feet. Out the door and into a narrow hall that connected the small cluster of rooms in the depths of the Treza her unlikely team had claimed as theirs. She could

hardly hear faint conversations drifting from the common room over the rushing of blood in her ears and the hammering of her heart.

"You're awake," an unfamiliar voice spoke from behind, the words a little stiff, but not unkind.

It wasn't odd to encounter people she'd never met among the resistance. But Errant had never seen an angel in the flesh, only their statues that stood as bitter monuments to a better time in New Capenna's history. The long-ago stewards of New Capenna had returned at last. Far too little, far too late, most likely. Two iridescent wings extended from the woman's back, arcing gracefully around her shoulders and framing her in a faint, mother-of-pearl glow.



Art by: Aaron J. Riley

"Yes, now, if you'll excuse me " Errant smothered the instant itch to try and capture the unique interplay of color and light in paint, alongside her curiosity of an angel's presence, with her worry for Parnesse.

"Would you like to see Parnesse?"

Errant's heart lurched. "Where is she?"

"This way." The angel led her to the room they'd begun using as triage. Sure enough, on one of the three cots, was Parnesse.

Errant rushed over, dropped to her knees, scooped up Parnesse's hand, and kissed her knuckles with a sigh of relief. The twitch of her fingers against Errant's lips was nearly enough to make her weep. She was alive. A hand closed around her shoulder.

"We should let her rest," the angel whispered.

It was true. But Errant couldn't bring herself to move. She lingered and savored the sight of her beloved in one glorious piece for another few minutes. Finally, she pulled herself away and followed the angel from the room.

"How?" Errant asked softly as the angel eased the door shut behind them. So many questions began with that word.

"You weren't far from the rendezvous point. When we heard the explosion, we knew you needed us," she said, matter of fact. "You two were greatly wounded. Luckily, I was present to mend your wounds instantly, though it required a significant portion of myself of my Halo, as you call it."

"Halo is truly wonderous," Errant mused softly. Errant had seen healers in the base using Halo to patch people up, she could only imagine what an angel—a being who was made of the stuff—could do.

"Halo is one of the most powerful magics we have. Powerful enough to even restore corporeal form to one of our kind who lost it previously."

"Could it cure Phyrexianization?" Perhaps it was because of the dream, but her father and friends from the Maestros that had been turned were in the forefront of Errant's thoughts. Halo was capable of so much more than a mere enhancement of powers, like it was used for before the Phyrexians attacked. It seemed like every day New Capenna was discovering new ways it could be used in their fight.

"Unfortunately, not." A frown tugged on the angel's lips. "Halo can act as preventative against the conversion, but not a cure."

"That's still a useful tool," Errant said thoughtfully, working to hide her personal disappointment. A cure had been too much to hope for.

"It is. It was also borne of great sacrifice. We had hoped there would be more for this fight." The angel had her own sorrows, it sounded like.

Errant changed the topic, starting for the common room at the far end of the hall. "How did you come to be here "

"Della," the angel finished for Errant. "My name is Della."

"How did you come to be here, Della?"

"That'd be my doing," Perrie said proudly as they entered the common room.

"*You* got an angel on our side?" Errant raised a brow at him as she crossed to the table where Perrie and Kamiz sat.

"The Brokers been hoarding Halo. Only natural we were the ones to negotiate with the beings made of it." Perrie pointed out as he breathed on his monocle, cleaning it fastidiously. Errant always thought it was comically small for the size of his face. But she would never tell the man who had the nickname "the Pulverizer" that she disagreed with his fashion choices.

"We are not something to be hoarded," Della murmured under her breath.

"Exactly," Errant picked up on it. "Angels hate the Brokers as much as the rest of us."

"I didn't say that" Della half-walked, half-glided to a seat at the table. "But any personal qualms can wait, for now. There will be nothing to squabble over if Atraxa gets what she wants and completely converts New Capenna."

"The families are gone, there already is nothing left to squabble over." Errant sat heavily in her usual chair.

"Just because you lost the Maestros doesn't mean the rest of our families are gone." Kamiz stretched the webbing between her fingers.

"I was never a Maestro. Just grew up with them." Errant's tone was tense. Every word dredging up a once fond memory she'd tried to smother when they'd become too painful to bear.

"Your father was the head of the family, for a time. You might as well have been one of them." Perrie returned his monocle to his face.

"Names no longer matter," Errant said curtly, trying to end talk of her family there.

"Speak for yourself." Henzie emerged from his workshop, returning his many golden rings to his fingers post-tinkering. "The Riveteers still got fight left in 'em. It's going to take a lot more than some otherworldly invasion to put us down for the count."

"The Obscura are fighting as well," Kamiz added.

"And the Brokers." Perrie was never one to be outdone.

"And what good has it done us?" Errant had a weariness in her bones that no amount of rest or Halo could cure. "Every day we are more in danger than the last."

"You've seen the sky—our city—it's all one big ole' tangled mess of Phyrexian tree limbs. What're we supposed to do *quickly* about that, doll?" Henzie sat, adjusting his cap around his horns. "The families are leading the resistance as best they can."

"Back-alley brawls, shootouts in the streets, and this 'master plan' rooted in finding whatever secret entry you needed." Errant had gone out looking for it herself, time and again.

"Well, we actually *did* find it," Henzie announced proudly. Errant stilled. *Had something finally gone their way?* "While you were off getting the detonators and charges, the Riveteers had a breakthrough. There's a core to the city—think like a main support beam that everything else was built off'a. We finally found how to get to it and now we know just the one place to whack it real good to bring down all Park Heights."

It seemed too good to be true. "Then what are we waiting for?"

"Patience, doll-face," Henzie encouraged.

"Patience? Patience?" Errant pointed her finger at Henzie. "We have been patient. We have worked tirelessly on this plan the families masterminded. And what has it gotten us so far? The same stuff the families always got New Capenna—fighting, stealing, and now the streets running black with glistening oil as we lose more and more by the hour."

"Listen, Ziatora's gonna check it all, first. Then we'll send you to scout it out. Then—"

"Me? You're sending me out again?"

"Errant—"

She knew Kamiz's placating tone. "No. No I'm done." Errant stood. "Every mission you've sent me on has been worse than the last and today was too close of a call. Parnesse and I are artists, not brawlers."

"I've seen the way you move through the city and beg to differ," Kamiz smirked. Errant ignored the praise.

"We can't do this without you." Perrie folded his arms. "Who's honestly going to get there and the charges in place? Me?" His nostrils flared with a snort. "You really want to see me try to walk along a tiny railing with these big feet?"

"And I don't know the scrawl," Henzie added.

"Kamiz is nimble enough and can read tagger's scrawl." Errant gestured to the woman.

"I know the *basics* of the scrawl. Face it, Errant, you're the cat's pajamas when it comes to getting around this city, especially now that all the normal paths are destroyed, barricaded, or patrolled. I can't compare to you when it comes to getting the charges in place," Kamiz continued to lay the flattery on thick.

"Then practice." Errant shrugged. "We got what you needed. I'm not risking mine or Parnesse's life any longer."

"My life isn't up to you to decide, dear wife." The woman in question spoke gently, but firmly. Parnesse stood in the entrance of the hall, looking as strong as ever. Though she still walked with a slight, worrying limp.

"But" Errant swallowed. Parnesse was right. It wasn't up to Errant to decide her fate. "I worry for us, is all."

"I worry for us every single day. All of us." Parnesse squeezed Errant's fingers. "But that's why we *must* keep fighting. I know you believe it, too."

Errant sighed heavily. She did. It was why she'd agreed to work with the resistance when they'd first approached her. Why she'd taught as many as she could the scrawl and how to find paths between buildings when it seemed like there was none.

"So you back in?" Henzie asked after a long, tense moment of silence. Errant met his eyes. He gave a slight shrug. *What else can you do?* the gesture asked. There was nothing else any of them could do. Nowhere they could go.

"Yes, I'm in. If the families can't be counted on to keep New Capenna safe, then someone's gotta do it." Errant could see Perrie bristle out of the corners of her eyes at the statement, but he didn't object or offer resistance. They all had differing opinions on how the families had, and hadn't, helped New Capenna survive. Best to leave it at that as much as possible. "I'm sorry for my outburst earlier."

"It's been a day and a half for you," Kamiz relaxed a bit in her chair. "Understandable, really."

"What now?" Errant didn't feel like lingering on herself.

"The final stage: Operation Falling Star," Henzie said with an air of authority and mystery. "We're going to take down Park Heights right on Atraxa's head."

"And how are we going to get Atraxa in position?" The head Phyrexian had been content to ignore them so far. "We could walk into broad daylight cursing her name and flipping the bird and Atraxa wouldn't even bat an eyelash. She doesn't see us as a threat."

"That's why we gotta do something real big. I've been chatting with Falco and, with the Riveteers getting together, his plans are moving into stage two," Perrie said with confidence.

"No wonder he's been causing so much trouble," Kamiz murmured. "If he continues what he's doing, or worse" Falco was the only one so far who had managed to make Atraxa's eye so much as twitch.

"Then the lead cockroach herself might go to the Nido sanctuary to put an end to it," Perrie finished.

"Right where we need her," Henzie said.

"If the plan is moving forward, I shall be able to lend some assistance to Falco as well. An angel, or two, will be even more tempting to Atraxa," Della added.

"Speaking of angels. The Brokers got some Halo in reserves." Perrie settled his hands on the table, as if he had to brace himself to confess as much. "That'll be comin' out, too."

"You've been holdin' out on us?" Henzie's tail twitched in agitation.

"Saving it for stage two," Perrie insisted.

"Good, get me some. I'm going to need it," Errant declared. When Perrie cast a skeptical look her way, she doubled down. "You are *not* sending me into thick of it without giving me proper ammunition. I

can't be blowing up charges if I get into a scrap." Perrie relaxed into his seat and agreed with a nod. "I'll also need a signal for when Atraxa is in position and it's time to detonate."

"I believe I can help with that, too," Della said.

"Good." It was an unlikely and risky plan and a little bit of Halo on her side wasn't going to change that. But it was the best they had and, in many ways, felt like New Capenna's last hope. Henzie had been right she couldn't walk away now.

"I'll report back to Ziatora, then. We've got one shot at this, so we'd better get it right." Henzie leaned forward, resting his pinstripe-covered elbows on the table.

"We will," Parnesse vowed for them all. "We're not going to let them steal New Capenna's beauty. Not when we've all worked so hard to make it."

It took a few days to get everyone on the same page. Some things in New Capenna never changed and one of those things was convincing the families to play nicely together—even when they shared a common enemy.

But, at last, they had worked out the final details. The plan was *finally* happening. Falco and his Brokers were in position. The remaining families were rallied around him, some in sight, many not. The Riveteers had gone ahead early, working to sure-up supports to guarantee that it was only Park Heights to fall, and to identify safe areas for their resistance. Della had rallied the angels. Errant had scoped out two routes—one for herself, and one for Parnesse.

Parnesse joined the team that was gathering up any remaining citizenry from Park Heights, trying to shepherd them away to a safe zone before it all came tumbling down. Errant could see them far below her from time to time as she made her way along rooftops, down the necks of cranes, across steel girders, and leaped between the monstrous branches of the Invasion Tree. Parnesse had wanted to be with her, but Errant was insistent she'd be faster alone. Plus, her wife knew Errant's hand of tagger's scrawl better than anyone and would have the best chance to lead the citizens to safety.

With any luck, she'd see them all again at the safe zone when this was over.

The bag of Riveteers' charges clanked against her hip and a map drawn by Henzie spun in her mind as she made her path through the passages of New Capenna that were hidden in plain sight. But keeping focused on her own job was difficult as the roar of converter beasts beneath rattled her bones. Something was going wrong. The Phyrexians were going after the escaping citizens, Parnesse included.

Errant reached for one of the jars attached to her hip, each was filled with a mixture of paint from her own stash and the Halo Perrie had gifted. She sprinted and vaulted off the tree branch she'd been running along. Mid-fall, she unleashed two of the jars. They fell with explosions of color and power, diverting the charge of the beasts below.

She landed on a balcony, rolled, and picked up speed again with two long steps before jumping off the jagged edge of the half-crumbled building. A converter beast turned its face up to her with a roar. Errant smirked and threw a third jar right in its mouth.

Halo-paint went everywhere. The beasts scattered, roaring in pain. Errant hadn't realized just how satisfying coloring those white, unblemished surfaces would be. This fight would be her masterpiece—the great mark she'd leave on New Capenna.



Art by: Olivier Bernard

One of the monsters changed course, starting in her direction. Errant landed on a railing, darting along it. She'd bought Parnesse and the citizens enough time—she hoped. Now she had to worry about herself. The beast mirrored her wild jumping from steel, to brick, to branch to close the distance to Errant. It blocked her pathway and let out an almost satisfied snarl.

"You don't honestly think those jars were all I had, do you?" Errant reached for the paint sprayer in her holster. It was an old model with a clunky upper portion and a large orb to hold paint in front of the handle. But its bulk gave room for Henzie to retrofit it to Errant's specifications. "Let's see what this can do."

Paint sprayed out, swirling with the iridescent rainbows of the with which Halo it was infused. It washed over the converter beast, changing it from monstrous reds and whites to a kaleidoscope of color more vibrant than an artist's palette.

The creature roared, reared back, and tumbled to the streets below. It landed with a splatter at the edge of the carnage Errant had reaped. Halo ricocheted. The air vibrated with magic like sunlight between the buildings on a hot day.

A surge of energy had her running faster than even before. A beast like that would've had her cowering in fear days ago. One like that had nearly ended her and Parnesse's lives. Now, she held the power of angels in her hands and was something these monsters should fear.

Errant charged ahead, further down back alleyways and then into service passageways with renewed confidence. Perhaps the rest of them were right; they had a chance. All she had to do was place the charges right where Henzie told her and then get out. Easy.

Deep within the heart of New Capenna was a core—a support structure early Riveteers had built that ran the entire length of the city. It was like a mighty trunk to the tree that was their home. Hidden in plain sight by a maze of girders and offshoots. Reached only through forgotten entries spelunked by the bravest urban explorers. Errant slowed her pace as she approached what felt like the metal heart of the city she so loved.

She began to unload her bag and placed the charges exactly where Henzie had instructed. The devil had told her that she had to be the one to do it because she was the fastest, most nimble, and the one who could confidently get to this point. But Errant wondered if it also had something to do with the fact that she *wasn't* a Riveteer. She had no connection to this structure the way they would. Destroying it would probably feel like losing a limb for them.

The explosives in place, Errant went to leave. But a lone figure blocked her path. She stared into familiar, yet strange, eyes. Errant blinked, convincing herself it wasn't a fresh nightmare. This was real. Her father stood before her.

But he wasn't the man she knew. Red sinew stretched up his neck. It bulged from under the pale plates that had replaced parts of his body with sharp, unnatural angles. Parts of his flesh had been hollowed out—a void where his heart once was. He was like a mural half-marred with graffiti. Glimpses of what once was were still visible. Yet it wasn't quite enough of anything.

He was a mockery of the man who'd raised her. And, yet, the mere sight of him made Errant want to run to him. To hold him and seek comfort for the girl within that still wept for the loss of her father she'd known.

"Errant," he rasped her name.

"Don't," she snapped. "Don't speak with his voice."

"This is *my* voice." Anhelo raised a hand to his chest, the other sweeping dramatically off to the side. "Just as you are my daughter."

"You—" she reached for her sprayer—"are not my father. He would never be one of *them*."

"Errant," he said her name in the same tone he'd *tsked* at her over the years, as though she was little more than a stubborn child. "Don't be so resistant. You were always keen to see beauty. Possibility. Your eye for it is impeccable. Come, I can show you the beauty of New Phyrexia. Our glorious future is not many, but one. One, single stroke of brilliance."

She watched his face as he spoke. Listened to his tone. He believed it every word. He truly thought that there was beauty in the singularity the Phyrexians were trying to collapse the whole Multiverse into.

"Beauty isn't found by coloring in the lines. It's not made with a single color, or one stroke." Errant slowly shook her head. "Beauty is mess and experimentation—failure and triumph and all the bitter yet sweet hardships that come from pushing the boundaries of what is known. It's in originality. You knew that, once."

"But then I saw the truth."

"You see only what they tell you." Errant took a step forward, the hand that held her sprayer shook. But could she unleash the power of Halo on her own father? Anhelo shifted, clearly trying to block her path. "Father, if you still hold any love for me, leave."

"It is because I love you that I want to protect you—you and Parnesse—you must both join the true path to be safe."

"You won't lay a finger on her. On either of us." Errant's fingers trembled over the nozzle release. *She couldn't do it.*

The sky lit up with an explosion of Halo, drawing both of their attention. This was it—Della's sign. Atraxa was in place. She had to move. Now.

"Enough. Join me." Anhelo tried to lunge for her, but she was too fast.

Errant leaped for a lower window. The shining Halo, falling through the sky like fireworks against the still glittering remains of New Capenna, contrasted with the gloam of the sheltered core. Perched on the sill, Errant met his eyes a final time, still shining with the glisten of the angel's signal. She raised a hand, flipping the switches on the detonator and exposing a final button.

"Goodbye, father," Errant whispered as she tipped backward, throwing her body through the girders of the core and into the open air beyond.

She pressed the button.

The core above her burst with orange flame and smoke. Building shuddered. The once enviable peaks of Park Heights were crumbling and burning to dust. The steel supports that had connected into the weak point Errant had exploited groaned and twisted. Structures fell like blossoms on a spring breeze. It felt as if the city itself was waking from a long slumber with a roar, determined to expel its invaders.

Errant landed hard on a ledge, rolling, scrambling, pulling her feet under and beginning to run through the crumbling chaos despite not yet catching her breath. Stone cracked beneath her, barely offering purchase as she jumped to a branch of the tree. Then back to a building. Her marked passageways were falling away into a chaotic maze.

Atraxa had wanted New Capenna and would have it shoved down her throat in pieces. And, once the invasion was gone, New Capenna would rebuild. Something even better than before.

Gritting her teeth, Errant pushed herself to her physical limit trying to keep herself upright. She stumbled, fell. But continued. She had to keep going, Parnesse was waiting for her back at the safe zone. It wasn't too much farther, all down from here. She could make it.

Errant threw her whole weight into the jump, but her hands missed the railing she was aiming for. Her stomach shot into her throat, blocking her scream. The world slowed as what might be her final second.

Then, two sturdy arms wrapped themselves around her. Her body slowed, hovering mid-air. Miraculously dodging the rain of debris.

"Della?" Errant blinked up at the angel—her savior once more.

"You looked like you could use some help." Della's wings stretched out behind her, and they glided down as weightless as a feather.

"The rest of the team?" Errant asked.

"They're all right."

Conversation was cut short by another loud rumbling. Without warning, a pulse of magic rippled across the city. It crashed upon the buildings like a tide of raw power. New Capenna shimmered with the might of Halo.

High above the city, the branches of the Invasion Tree began to shrivel, retreating through the portals torn into the heavens. For the first time in what felt like ages, she could see glimpses of an unfractured sky. In response, war horns echoed throughout the city.

"A counter-attack?" she asked frantically.

"Yes, ours." Della turned her face skyward as well as a mass of angels rose to the vacant portals, charging after the branches and into planes beyond.

"What's happening?"

"The angels are being unleashed into the Multiverse, bringing the power of Halo with them." Della's wings stretched further as her feet finally touched a solid rooftop and she released Errant.

"Is it the end?" Errant remained focused on the angels leaving New Capenna. They took their magic and might with them. But something assured her that New Capenna would be all right even without them. For once, they'd managed to work together. Perhaps it was the start of a bright new future.

"No," Della admitted, somewhat sadly. "This alone will not be enough to end this war but it might give us the chance to win. You—New Capenna have played your part and made your sacrifices. Now it's our turn."

"Errant!"

The shout had her heart racing. Errant spun, realizing they had landed at the edge of the rooftop in the Mezzio that Henzie had marked as safe from the demolition. She'd been so focused on what New Capenna had lost that she nearly missed what was still standing: Perrie, Henzie, Kamiz, all the citizens that had escaped the fall of Park Heights and—most important of them all—Parnesse.

Errant inked the memory of her wife sprinting across the distance between them upon her mind with every vivid emotion. She'd savor this moment until the end of her days, knowing it was too beautiful for a brush or sprayer to ever capture.

"Parnesse!" Errant opened her arms just in time for Parnesse to throw herself into them. "You're all right."

"So are you. I was so worried." Parnesse relaxed her grip, staring up at Errant with that stunning smile that made her knees weak.

"I'm fine, thanks to—" Errant stopped mid-sentence. The angel was gone. "Della "

"Where is she going?" Parnesse had tilted her head skyward. Errant wondered if she could find Della among all the soaring angels, rushing to the open portals.

"To help us win this war." The words were vaguely sweet, yet salty from all the tears that had been spilled to reach this moment.

"It's breathtaking," Parnesse whispered.

Thick smoke. Shining angels. Angry tears that unnaturally ripped between the clouds. A city burning down and yet somehow also rising in tandem.

Errant's arm slipped around her wife's waist. "It is it looks like hope."