

Beyond Repair

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Deep within the bowels of what had once been the Emeria Skyclave, Nahiri ripped the taint of Phyrexia from her plane.

In theory, it was a straightforward process: remove the metal that had been grafted into the surroundings and leave behind nothing but the original stone. In practice, it was a nightmare. Completion had fused stone and metal together on a molecular level, and disentangling the two took an excruciating amount of patient, intricate work for every handspan of metal. Fortunately, Nahiri had nothing if not time.

She'd lost track of how long she'd been down here in the dark. At first the lack of sight had been disorienting, but eventually her other senses had attuned to compensate, and now she knew every inch of her surroundings. She knew the drip of water down stone, the cold hiss of wind through the corridors, the bloody tang of rust. She knew that she was alone.

The first order of business when she'd woken up to find the invasion over and herself somehow still alive had been to rip all remaining traces of metal from her body. The process had been painful, and bloody. Peeling off the metal had taken less than a day, but it had been several more before the wounds finished scabbing over, and weeks before the scabs all fell off. The entire time, she'd been on edge, expecting people to come looking for her. As time passed, Nahiri realized that everyone must assume she was dead—or rather, they didn't care if she was alive.

Well, that was fine by her. She had work to do.

Currently, she faced a tricky situation: She'd been working through a particular corridor for the last few days, but now her way was blocked by a wall of interlaced metal, all fused into the surrounding rock. The metal pieces were wickedly sharp; she'd cut herself exploring the shape of them. She'd have to dismantle it all before she could proceed further.

Wrapping her hands around a metal claw, she felt for the seam where stone and metal tangled together, coaxing the stone to loosen its grip. She tried not to dwell on how much effort it took. Every act of lithomancy cost her now, where before it had taken little more than a thought to shape stone to her will.

Then again, she was no longer a Planeswalker.

She couldn't say for sure what had happened. All she remembered was a blast of Halo searing into her, moments before the Skyclave had fallen, with her still inside. Perhaps the Halo had been what had allowed her—maybe others as well—to survive after New Phyrexia's grip had fallen apart. Perhaps it was something to do with the fact that she had been fused into the Skyclave itself. She didn't know for sure. All she knew was that she was alive, and hollow. The core of her power, her spark, no longer a part of her.

At first the pain of its absence had been so great she'd thought she would die, but over time, she'd grown used to the hollow ache in her soul. She'd grown to accept she was now weak.

Once she'd loosened the stone's grip sufficiently on the metal, she braced herself and tugged. The metal resisted—and then jerked so abruptly free that Nahiri stumbled and fell. She landed hard on her rear, and the claw came to rest with the point digging in just below her sternum, just shy of puncturing her skin.

Nahiri froze. Memories surged through her: How it had felt when the metal had been not just pressing against her heart but wrapped around it, when her soul had been melded to the glory of the machine. How pure and untainted their vision of perfection, how glorious Zendikar could be through its salvation—

With a shudder, she shoved the thoughts away. They belonged to an entity that did not exist. That was the ghost of Phyrexia. It was not her.

It was *not* her.

The claw's tip scraped lightly against her skin as she wriggled out from underneath. Once she was free, she wrapped her hands around it, careful to avoid the cutting edges, and retraced her steps back through the corridor, letting the claw drag in her wake. The rasp of the metal against stone echoed all around her.

The corridor wound in a twisted upward slope. When the echoes changed, hollowing out, she knew she was nearing her destination. She slowed down and edged forward until her feet touched the edge of a cliff. If she took another step, she'd fall into the pit containing her masterpiece: a mountainous cairn of Phyrexian metal, all the pieces of Phyrexia she'd spent the last days, weeks, who knew how long, ripping out of the Skyclave.

There was probably enough there by now to rival the height of Sea Gate itself, and she'd still only scratched the surface of what the Skyclave contained. It would take months to rip it all free. Years, perhaps, but she wouldn't rest until she had scoured every trace of the cursed metal from this place.

She'd have to figure out how to destroy it eventually. But right now, if she could pry Phyrexia's cold, alien grip off her plane, that was good enough.

And after that?

She would deal with that then. But for now, this was all she could do. It would have to be enough.

Once upon a time she would have been angry. She would have raged against the Multiverse for stripping her of her power, for delivering this fate to her. But now where anger should have been, she felt only hollowness, and a grim weariness to see the job done.

She tossed the piece of metal into the dark and turned back down the slope.

Small skittering creatures scuttled through the dark: tough, scrawny things of too many bones and too little meat. Aside from Nahiri, they were the only living things in this place. Every now and then, she caught one in a fist of stone, crushing it and superheating the rock to cook it directly. The act of eating was tedious, but necessary. She found herself longing for the taste of kor cuisine. Not the cooking of recent centuries—the hardy, straightforward campfire fare that kor caravans have been reduced to—but the more nuanced tastes of a culture the plane had long forgotten, back when she was still just a mortal. She'd eat it again once she was done here, she promised herself, and didn't think about how long that might take.

The wall of metal came down, only to reveal another one behind it. She took that one down too to find yet another. Then another, and another. A vague sense of dread grew in her with every layer peeled away. This Skyclave had been the heart of the engine meant to convert Zendikar itself; the walls must

have been put up deliberately to protect some core component. They certainly wouldn't have been for decoration; Phyrexia was nothing if not efficient. Indecision and frivolity were weaknesses of flesh. It was nothing like a machine, pure and gleaming, incorruptible, *beautiful* —

Nahiri grabbed the closest piece at hand and *ripped* it free in a savage burst of lithomancy that left her body trembling and shaking, sensations she gladly embraced. Focus on the here and now. Don't think about what came before. Don't think about what you used to be.

Don't think about what you did.

At last the final wall came down, and she walked through to find herself in the chamber where she had bound herself into the Skyclave itself.

She knew it as soon as she set foot inside. The room sang to her, stone and metal woven together like the weft and warp of fabric where she had been fused into the very walls. In that deliberate plaiting she could read Phyrexia's influence, how it had sought to take the material of this plane and turn it against itself. Because that was what Phyrexia did best, wasn't it? Corrupt the essence of a plane, take your urge to protect and shield and twist it to serve their own ends

A wave of dizziness and nausea swept over her, and she put a hand against the wall to steady herself. But for once, the touch of Phyrexian metal comforted her. It didn't matter what this place had been. Phyrexia was gone for good. Still, she walked the perimeter of the room, trailing a hand over the wall to reassure herself that the metal was, in fact, dead.

And then she brushed a section of the wall and felt a fluttering shock of power deep inside.

Instinct snatched her hand back. Her first impulse was to grab the surrounding stone and squeeze it inwards, crushing whatever lay within. But the sensation hadn't been unpleasant. If anything, it had felt familiar.

Cautiously, Nahiri placed her hand on the wall again. There it was, a little whorl of power embedded in metal and stone. Now that she was focusing, she thought she could feel the outlines. It wasn't too deep within the metal.

Curiosity battled with dread and won. She retreated to the outside corridor and shaped herself a blade of stone.

She cut slowly, channeling heat into the edge of the blade to melt the metal apart. The last thing she wanted was to damage the object she was trying to cut free, so she focused on the act, forcing herself not to think about what it might be

Her blade touched empty air, and the object fell out of the wall and into her waiting hand.

She held a lump of stone the size of her fist. She ran her hands over it, feeling its contours. It was a hedron, if that hedron had grown in impossibly thin slices of stone layer by layer around a central seed, like an oyster laying down coats of pearl around a speck of grit. The whole thing felt delicate, like even an ounce of wrong pressure would crush them. As for the grit in its center

It was her Planeswalker spark.

The feel of it was unmistakable. Now that she held it in her hands, she could feel the rush of power that it contained, that had been hers for centuries. She was suddenly, acutely aware of the hollow in her where her spark had once been, that emptiness she'd been trying so hard to ignore.

Empty, because I poured everything I had into destroying my home. I burned myself out trying to save it from itself, because I believed I was doing right at that time.

Her heart thudded in her chest like the strike of a hammer on metal. Something bubbled up in her that she hadn't thought she was capable of anymore.

Hope.

The weight of metal above, below, and all around her: suddenly it was suffocating. And the darkness. When was the last time she'd seen sunlight? How long had it been since she'd seen her home, seen Zendikar itself? She reached out, gripped stone in great grasping fistfuls, and with a surge of power, *heaved*.

Stone ruptured upward. Metal shrieked and peeled away in violent blossoms. The stone punched through the roof the chamber, and then up and further up, until, far above, it pierced the vaulted roof of the Skyclave itself, a rough set of stairs that stretched from her feet all the way to the outside. Sunlight dripped into the darkness.

Nahiri sat down hard. Her whole body shook with exhaustion, and she had to swallow rapidly to keep from vomiting, but it was done. She had a way out.

As her eyes adjusted to the light, she saw her body for the first time. She'd known she was scarred, of course; she'd felt them in the dark. But it was one thing to feel, and another to see the puckered white lines that striped her skin: The diamond pattern of the Skyclaves seared into her where flesh had fused to metal, ripped free, then fused again, over and over. Overlaid against that coldly geometric precision were newer, harsher welts, where she herself had clawed the disgusting, beautiful touch of metal from her body.



Art by: Marta Nael

She ran a finger along a jagged seam tracing down the outside of her right hand, all the way from the tip of her middle finger to her elbow. There had been a heart of metal in the stone blades grafted onto her hands, and right after she'd woken up, she hadn't yet figured out how to disentangle the two the way she did now. Even if she had, she wouldn't have cared. All she'd wanted was to rescue herself from Phyrexia's grip, no matter how much she damaged herself in doing so. Flesh could always heal, after all. It seemed like a small penance to pay for having failed Zendikar yet again.

She pushed herself to her feet. Her legs were still a little shaky, but at least her stomach no longer felt like it wanted to heave itself up her throat. The hedron fit snugly into her palm, as though it belonged there, and she supposed in a way that it did.

Nahiri began to climb.

The way up was longer than she'd anticipated; she hadn't realized just how far down she'd been. The light steadily increased the higher she got, until her eyes ached with the strain of it. By the time she emerged onto the Skyclave's hull, her eyes were closed and she was feeling her way by stone sense alone.

The touch of wind on her face felt as alien as the air of a new plane. For a moment, she simply stood there, trying not to flinch from the touch of it. Even through the skin of her eyelids, her eyes hurt. It would take a while before she grew accustomed to seeing again.

Or was that the only reason she was keeping them so resolutely closed?

Look, you coward.

She opened her eyes.

The world was a blurred smear of light and color. Then the light ebbed, and Zendikar resolved itself into existence.

She almost howled at the sight. It was worse than any wreckage the Roil had ever caused, worse than when the Eldrazi had eaten their way through Bala Ged. Sinew and metal extended as far as she could see, warped and rent with rivers of oil. She saw all too plainly the brute force of Phyrexia at work, the blind bulldozing of native earth, eager simply to spread compleation as far, and as fast, as possible. The scope of it was almost unfathomable. This wasn't something that mortals could fix; this was a problem for gods.

And she'd thought she could dismantle it, one insignificant piece at a time.

Bitterness curdled in her belly. Gods, had she really convinced herself she was doing something meaningful down there in the Skyclave, plucking at scraps? She might as well have tried to separate the sea back into its component rivers. Her useless little pickings were nothing compared to what Phyrexia—no, what she had accomplished.

Seeing Zendikar, she could no longer deny it: This was her doing. Phyrexia had wielded her like a hammer, but she had still been the one to strike, to bring Phyrexia's weight down on her home. This was her fault.

The scars on her arms pulled taut as she curled her hands into fists. Well, maybe she'd been part of the problem before, but she was done with hiding like a coward. Now she was going to fix things, return them to the way they'd been before. Which meant, first things first, finding a way to restore her spark.

In the light of day, the hedron's translucent delicacy looked even more impossible, the layered slices of stone a three-dimensional palimpsest that caught the sunlight and fractured it into an iridescent rainbow. This must have been a protective barrier of some sort, an instinctive protection her spark had grown to protect itself while it was being used to fuel the Skyclave engine. Somehow, she had to find a way to extract it and fuse it into herself again. She would leave this place and find whatever allies she still had on Zendikar—Kesanya, perhaps. Nahiri had helped Kesanya start her expedition house, and that was a debt the other woman was sure to acknowledge, even if their current relationship was less than ideal. And Kesanya had connections to expedition houses across practically every continent. Even if she didn't know what to do, she'd be able to point Nahiri in a promising direction.

The plan crystallized in her mind, chasing away some dark fog she hadn't realized was there. A sense of purpose filled her. It felt good to have a goal in mind again. She should have left the Skyclave ages ago. She heard it before she sensed it, the displacement of air like a hard exhale. A breeze ruffled her hair. She spun around, knowing before she did what was coming.

A Planeswalker.

The irony of the situation didn't escape her, that a Planeswalker would come hunting her down now, at this moment. She'd made a lot of enemies in her travels through the Multiverse, and she was weak. If it was Sorin who had come seeking her, or Jace

But the figure who appeared in front of her was larger than any she'd expected, with a strong feline face and white fur covering his entire body. A scar ran through the left eye socket.

"Hello, Nahiri," Ajani said.

For a moment, Nahiri could only stare, feeling an undeniable sense of relief that the Planeswalker she had sensed wasn't one of her enemies. In fact, Ajani was the last person in the Multiverse she would have expected to see. She barely knew him. When she'd last seen him, it had been as Elesh Norn's most faithful evangel, her most favored lieutenant. The leonin who stood before her now was not plated and seamed with porcelain. Now he was just himself. Flesh. Untainted.

And still a Planeswalker.

She blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "What are you doing here?" It emerged a rusty, hoarse croak. It had been a long time since she'd spoken.

"Isn't it obvious? I came looking for you." His eyes moved over her. She met his gaze steadily, challenging him to say something about her appearance. "I thought I expected to find you dead."

She smiled humorlessly. "Disappointed?"

"Surprised." His whiskers twitched. "The others are dead, you know."

"Who?"

"The others." When she didn't respond, he continued, "Tamiyo. Lukka. Jace and Vraska, too, I would guess, except no one's found their bodies yet."

The other Planeswalkers who had been Elesh Norn's evangels. A roster of those who had led the charge against their homeworlds. The syllables of their names clawed her ears. "And Nissa?"

For a long while, Ajani didn't answer, long enough that Nahiri thought he wasn't going to. "She survived as well," he said at last, "but she's been damaged. I don't know what happened; some part of the process when we were cleansed of Phyrexia, but she can no longer planeswalk. I can, but it took everyone. Teferi, Kaya, Melira so many others. They saved me. They cleansed me of the taint of Phyrexia and kept me intact." A shudder passed through him. "The others weren't so lucky as you and I."

Nahiri kept her hand curled around the hedron, hiding it from sight. He was clearly still sensing her spark, even though it was no longer in her. If he wanted to think she was still a Planeswalker, she saw no reason to inform him otherwise. No reason to reveal any sign of weakness, not with that strange look on his face that made him look guilty, she would have said. But about what? "Who sent you?"

"What?"

"You can't have come on your own volition. Who asked you to find me?"

"No one." He sounded surprised. "I just wanted to see what had become of you."

“Well, if that’s all you came to see about, you can be on your way. I’m fine.” She walked over to the edge of the Skyclave hull and peered down. Her first step would be to get back down to ground level. This side was steep, but she could make handholds for herself to climb. Luckily, the Skyclave had crashed into a flat plain, so at least she wouldn’t have to fight through tangled forests or thickets. Before, she never would have had to care. She could have simply willed herself wherever she liked.

Soon, she promised herself.

The back of her neck prickled. She turned to find Ajani was staring at her. “What?” she snapped.

“Are you?” he asked.

“Am I what?”

“Are you really fine?”

Her eyes narrowed. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Ajani said nothing. Some of the initial relief she had felt faded, replaced with unease. Something about this wasn’t right. No one came looking for her unless it was for a purpose, and in her experience, those purposes had rarely been benevolent. “Look, I’m fine. So if you don’t mind, go away and leave me alone. I’m busy right now.”

“Healing Zendikar, correct?”

She bristled. “And if I am?”

Another silence. Nahiri realized she was tensing her entire body, and forced herself to relax. Ajani’s whiskers twitched. “I have a proposal to make.”

“I’m not interested,” Nahiri said at once.

“Will you not even hear me out?” The words were still soft, but there was a growl to them, a gleam in his eye. Anger or threat, Nahiri didn’t know, and she didn’t have to; the danger was clear.

She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Ever since things ended, I’ve been traveling the planes, and the scope of destruction we wrought. I’m sure I don’t need to tell you the untold damage to the Multiverse. Someone needs to make amends for what we’ve done. To fix things.” He took a deep breath. “That could be you and I.”

It took a moment for his meaning to sink in. “You want me to join you? Be your partner in fixing the Multiverse?” An incredulous laugh slipped out of her. “You have others who would willingly assist you. They saved you, didn’t they? Go ask them instead. I’m sure you have plenty of friends who’d jump on the chance to do so.” Despite herself, she couldn’t keep the bitterness out of her voice. “I told you already I’m not interested, so you can go off and save the rest of the Multiverse. In fact, you’re welcome to it. But you leave Zendikar alone. This is my home, not yours. I’ll repair it myself, without your—your meddling.”

He shook his head in irritation. “This isn’t just about the Multiverse. It’s also about us. No one else faced what we did. We’re the only ones left who knows what it’s like to go through what we went through.”

“What we went through,” Nahiri repeated. “You mean as Phyrexians.” The word was sour in her mouth. She made herself say it anyway. Ajani flinched. “Nissa knows.”

“She’s also no longer a Planeswalker.” Nahiri’s grip on her hedron tightened. “She never saw the aftermath of what we wrought. Out of everyone in the Multiverse, you and I, Nahiri, are the only ones

who can truly know the sins we committed. That's why we must be there for each other. We need to help each other, for our own good. And we can't do it alone."

Nahiri scowled, not bothering to hide her annoyance. She'd always considered Ajani somewhat high-handed, the way he assumed he knew what was best for everyone, but this was too much. "I never asked for your help," she snapped, "and I won't be a balm for your guilt. You'll just have to learn to live with it instead."

His ears flattening against his skull. "Do you think I'm here on a whim?" he growled. "This thing must be done. We bore the sin of it here; we must be the ones to fix it. Whatever it takes." And when she didn't respond, he continued, voice softer but unsteady now, "Doesn't it haunt you, what we did? I remember everything as a Phyrexian." It seemed to cost him to say that word. "Every evil act, every memory. It's there, intact. Is it the same for you?"

Abruptly, she saw herself, kneeling on the neck of a Skyclave elemental, anointing it—no, drowning it—in oil. How she had blessed—cursed—corrupted—everything she touched, dragging Phyrexia in her wake in a glistening skirt. How she had believed with all her heart that she was saving her plane from something worse. A bitter, metallic taste flooded her mouth. Furious, she shoved the memory away. "I've already told you to leave me alone, what about that don't you understand? Why are you still here?"

"Because I want to help you," Ajani snarled. "How many times must I repeat myself?"

Nahiri glared, but even as she did, a cold, trickling awareness filled her. Ajani was a Planeswalker, and still in full control of his powers. To come all this way, just because they'd both served together under Elesh Norn, was ridiculous. No one in their right mind would willingly want to dwell on that time.

What if he was here to kill her?

If he was, then it all made sense. His presence here. The way he kept pressing her to dwell on her time as a Phyrexian—he could be trying to destabilize her emotionally, making it easier for him to surprise her with an attack. Ajani had been Elesh Norn's strategist, the most ruthless and loyal of her evangelists. Phyrexia changed your allegiance but not the core of who you were. That single-minded purposefulness, that capacity for ruthlessness, had to have come from Ajani himself.

He had come to Zendikar seeking her out specifically. He had wanted to find if she was alive. He could very well have determined to seek out all the former evangelists and end them, to cleanse the plane of Phyrexia's taint. Whatever it takes, he had said. He was right about one thing, if nothing else: they had caused a lot of damage. From what she knew of Ajani, he was not one to let such wrongs stand if there was something he could do about it.

It was something she herself might have done as well, if she could.

Lukka, she thought abruptly. Tamiyo. Vraska. He hadn't said how they had died.

He hadn't said who had killed them.

As subtly as she could, she reached out with her power, flooding the Skyclave hull all around her. He'd made a mistake, giving her forewarning. If he was planning to kill her, she would at least be ready for it. She might not be a match for him, but she could at least slow him down long enough to—hopefully—escape.

If he'd realized she'd seen through to his true motive though, he gave no sign of it. He was pacing back and forth now, short, sharp bursts of restless motion, his tail lashing from side to side. "We need each other, Nahiri, whether you want to admit it or not. I know what it's like to be where you are now. Who else can say that? Who else will truly be able to comprehend the darkness and self-loathing of what

you've done? Who else will understand?" He stopped abruptly and swung to face her again. A note of pleading entered his voice. "Let me help you heal—and help *me* heal. "

Disbelief flashed through Nahiri. Heal? *Heal*? With her plane wrecked, her spark torn from her, and her body reshaped in ways that would tell the tale of Phyrexia's claws in her until the end of time? While he stood there, looking unscathed by the ordeal, looking *whole* ? But of course he would. He'd had friends to pull him out from the mess and patch him up and take care of him, whereas she—she had only ever had herself.

"Don't you dare tell me what I need, you miserable cat," Nahiri hissed. "You don't know the half of what I've gone through. You don't know what's been done to me. You don't know what sins I've committed."

"So talk to me . I want to help you."

"No," Nahiri spat. "Who are you to come here and lecture me about what I should or should not be doing? What gives you the right? You and your friends are what got me in this state"—she swept a hand over her body—"in the first place. If you want someone to talk to about all this, go find Nissa. Or Chandra, she's your friend, isn't she? Why aren't you crying on her shoulder?"

Another flinch, this one sharper. A dangerous growl rose in Ajani's throat.

Nahiri knew she should have stopped then, but a recklessness had seized her. The edges of the hedron dug into the palm of her hand, the pain a sharp, focusing clarity. "I was only involved in this mess because of your weakness. Do you think they would've had to call on the likes of me if the great Ajani Goldmane hadn't fallen? Hadn't stood at Elesh Norn's side and told her exactly how to beat them? You slaughtered the gods of Theros. You murdered Jaya Ballard. And now you want to stand here and tell *me* how I should atone?"

A look of fury suffused Ajani's face, and a full-throated snarl ripped him, an anguished sound more animal shriek than anything else. His claws unsheathed, and Nahiri didn't have to guess at the expression of murderous grief on his face.

She yanked on the stone around her, flinging it between the two of them. She'd only meant to form a wall, something to slow him down while she scaled the Skyclave's hull, but then stone buckled under her feet, and she realized she'd overestimated the strength she'd needed. She had the space of a breath to realize the mistake she'd made, and then the dome of the Skyclave collapsed beneath her feet.



Art by: Miguel Mercado

The last thing she saw was Ajani's eyes widening in alarm as he lunged toward her, one paw outstretched, mouth open to shout her name.

She fell.

A jagged smear of light soared distantly above: a hole in the roof of the Skyclave, a tear in the fabric of the plane. At first, surfacing from unconsciousness, Nahiri could only stare. The hole was so distant that it didn't make sense. Surely she should be dead after having fallen so far. And yet here she was, still alive somehow, through sheer luck and nothing else.

She tried to sit up, and nearly screamed as her shoulder flamed with pain. She put a hand to it and touched a shard of metal, a claw that had pierced through the back of her shoulder and out the other side. Phyrexian metal. She had fallen on the cairn she herself had created.

She almost couldn't make herself reach over and grab the metal. The pain when she pulled it free made her yell. But then it was out, and she lay there, shoulder throbbing and her nose filling with the smell of blood. She could do it. Pain was a temporary state of being. Flesh could always heal. As soon as she was a Planeswalker again, this would be nothing more than a distant memory—

Her hands were empty. Where was the hedron?

Nahiri bolted upright, eyes already darting across the cairn. She'd been holding the hedron when she fell, which meant it had to have fallen with her yes, there it was, nestled in a curve of jagged metal halfway down. She crawled toward it, metal edges biting into her hands and knees.

As soon as she picked it up though, she knew something was wrong. The slices of thin, fragile stone that had petaled around the core were cracked, and even the ones still intact looked duller, rougher. It must have been shattered in the fall. She couldn't feel her spark at all.

For a moment all Nahiri could do was sit there and stare. Whatever essence of herself had been infused in the stone was there no longer. Her last hope at regaining her power—at becoming a Planeswalker once more—was gone. All she had left to fix Zendikar with was herself: powerless.

She would have laughed, if she didn't think it would break her apart.

She let the hedron drop from her hand. It tumbled down the side of the cairn, and she didn't bother to see which way it fell.

By the time she finally emerged back to the top of the Skyclave, the pain in her shoulder had settled into an insistent throb. She had to step carefully; the whole of the Skyclave's dome felt fragile, and she was so exhausted and half-blind with pain that she couldn't have reinforced so much as a single tile. Ajani was nowhere to be seen.

Nahiri was aware of an emotion building within her, something deep and warm and familiar. There was grief, that long, slow sorrow for her plane that had suffered so much and been broken so many times. But beneath that was something even hotter, and more familiar.

Anger.

She could see it all so clearly now. The real threat, the real problem, was not herself. It was not even Phyrexia. It was Planeswalkers. This was what Planeswalkers did. They went to a new plane, wreaked havoc on it, then departed without further thought for the damage they caused. Just as Ajani had come here, seeking her for his own selfish purposes, ruined her last chance of truly healing Zendikar, and then ran away, leaving her to deal with the consequences of his actions.

She should know. She used to be one herself.

Nahiri clenched her fists, feeling her nails bite into her palms. The fury felt good, the warmth of it comforting and familiar. Anger she knew. Anger she could harness, could use to fuel more works in the future.

And she knew what she needed to do next.

If not for Planeswalkers, Phyrexia wouldn't have been able to reach across the Multiverse, and Zendikar wouldn't have been blighted as it had. Sorin and Ugin would never have been able to bind the Eldrazi in her home, all those thousands of years ago, and awaken the Roil. As long as people like them existed, her home would always be under threat.

Zendikar had always been able to recover from the ravages that had been wrought on it. But even planes grew weary, and sooner or later it would encounter something—or someone—that broke the heart of it beyond all repair.

Not if she could help it, though.

She was done with hiding away in the dark. She might not wield the power she previously had, but that didn't mean she was helpless.

There were still things she could do. Still ways, perhaps, to close Zendikar off from outside forces who would do it harm.



Art by: Alexey Kruglov

Nahiri looked out over the wreck of her plane, her beautiful, blighted, broken home. She would protect it until her last breath. She was still Zendikar's guardian, after all. She would always be Zendikar's guardian.

"No more," she breathed. "No more pain. No more suffering." Her voice hardened with furious conviction. "Whatever it takes, I swear. No Planeswalker will set foot on Zendikar ever again."