

# Limits

## Ari Levitch

### From set *Prologue to Battle for Zendikar*

*Planeswalker Gideon Jura has a problem—there's only one of him. Zendikar is a world ravaged by otherworldly monsters known as the Eldrazi. Gideon witnessed their devastation when he first visited the plane, and vowed to return with help. No Planeswalkers heeded his call, and he refused to let Zendikar languish. On Ravnica, Gideon found kindred spirits among the disciplined Boros Legion, but the politics of the plane favor those associated with a guild, and Gideon finds that he must step in on behalf of those not under guild protection. Zendikar by day. Ravnica by night. Gideon cannot turn his back on those who need him, and trouble may be reaching boiling point on both planes.*

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### **Zendikar**

Gideon's muscles ached and his breath was labored. Dust burned in his lungs. It coated his nostrils and caused his eyes to water steadily. Grit had worked its way behind his eyelids, and he blinked desperately to flush it out.

He could even taste it on his tongue. What moisture he had remaining in his mouth, he gathered up and spat into the tall grass that poked up through the gathered dust all around him.

He had to end this quickly.

The Eldrazi monstrosity loomed over Gideon, almost twice his height, its torso rising up on a mass of thick, fleshy tendrils that slid heavily over the tall grass. Like so many others Gideon had battled these last few weeks, this one's face was encased almost entirely in a smooth, boney texture. Though eyeless, its head turned to follow Gideon's movements. It was an unsettling gesture, devoid of malice, or hate, or anger.

The Eldrazi were unlike other opponents Gideon had fought, at once graceful and lurching, willful and indifferent. There was no body language to read, no tells whatsoever, and it was all Gideon could do to stay beyond this one's reach.

Tendrils lashed out. But so did the four ribbon-like metal blades of his sural. Gideon yanked his arm back and the blades flicked out, severing a tendril. The gore was not blood, but a viscous, sticky muck that caught Gideon's flexible blades, interrupting the flow of his follow-through.

Clumsy.

Another tendril slammed into his ribs before he could angle out of its path. He saw it coming, but there was only enough time for Gideon to grit his teeth and anticipate the blow while ripples of protective light reflexively flared across his body to meet the blow, leaving him unharmed. For the moment, anyway.

Littering the tall grass all around him were rough chunks of a fallen, shattered hedron—one of the countless eight-faced monolithic stones that Gideon had seen while on the plane. There was something about them that the Eldrazi reacted to. Nobody could quite explain it to him, but many of the Zendikari carried small hedrons as wards, or replaced spearheads and arrowheads with them. The kor

even painted their bodies with designs that matched the hedrons' intricate carvings. To Gideon, at that moment, what mattered was that the hedron chunks were heavy and jagged.



Plains | Art by Vincent Proce

He had to buy himself some time. A moment at least.

More tendrils. Gideon leapt to his right, contorting his body to slip between the writhing, grasping limbs. He rolled on the ground, and the Eldrazi monstrosity reeled its tendrils back for another barrage.

There it was.

A moment.

And in it, Gideon was on his feet. He charged flat out toward the unnerving being, and it descended on him, quicker than a being that size should move.

“Enough!” Gideon roared.

He sent the blades of his sural out to snare a helmet-sized, pointed piece of hedron that tapered at one end like a crude awl. As the Eldrazi swooped low, Gideon swung. Hedron connected with boney faceplate. No shriek of agony followed. No spurt of blood welled. Just a brittle snap, the combined force of Gideon's swing and the Eldrazi's own momentum driving the ancient stone deep. A moment later, the Eldrazi collapsed, unmoving.

Gideon untangled his sural and sank to the ground. Blood continued to pump furiously through his veins, and he was aware of how much the pounding in his temples stood out against the sudden silence of his surroundings. His dust-caked face was streaked with lines of sweat, but the sun felt good on his face and he was smiling.

To his right, something approached. Several things, moving swiftly through the tall grass in his direction. From his position, he saw a dozen or so figures nimbly making their way across the field of fallen hedrons. They were mostly kor, but Gideon noted elves, humans, and even a pair of goblins among them. At the head of the group was a particularly broad kor. Like others, his pale bare chest and bald scalp were covered in angular white tattoos, and he held a pair of hooked blades that were

connected by a length of chain. He crouched as he ran, and the various climbing lines he carried at his belt bounced with each step.

“Munda!” Gideon called out. At the sound, the approaching group went to ground. All except the lead kor, who stood alert but still, his brow fixed in a practiced furrow. The kor cocked his head trying to make out the source of his name among the tall grass.

“Careful now, people,” Munda called over a shoulder, his tone rich with amusement that struck Gideon as contrary to the kor’s characteristic dourness. “A Gideon prowls these lands, and it looks to be guarding its kill.”

They must have had a successful hunt. The thought made Gideon’s smile widen. “It’s good to see you, my friend,” he said. Munda, called the Spider by those who have seen him in action weaving his ropes to trap and inhibit the Eldrazi, was both cunning and bold in a fight, and Gideon had liked him immediately.

Munda waved a blade at the Eldrazi corpse. “And you. Your timing couldn’t be better,” Munda said in what had become a running joke between them, as there was always some peril to confront. “Looks like you haven’t wasted any time, either. Thank you for that. We just destroyed one as well, but there were four of them. Have you seen the others?”

Gideon casually pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, indicating the direction beyond the Eldrazi carcass.

Munda eyed Gideon suspiciously. “Ready yourselves,” he said to the others before climbing the Eldrazi carcass for a better vantage point. Peering out over the plain, he spotted his quarry, two lifeless heaps of magenta and blue against the golden grass.

“Have a look, everyone. This is how it’s done.” He leapt off the carcass, and his soldiers scrambled around him to admire Gideon’s handiwork.

Munda put a hand on Gideon’s shoulder, and Gideon saw that the time for levity had passed. “We got word this morning that Bala Ged, the entire continent, has been overrun and destroyed. There’s nothing left.”

Gideon stared past Munda, watching the grass bend to the subtle wind. “Like Sejiri,” he said finally.

“Just like Sejiri,” Munda confirmed. “Survivors will be landing on the coast. Commander Vorik sent Tazri and her band to escort them to Sea Gate, but...”

“You don’t think it will be enough.

“There’s more trouble coming, Gideon.”

It was a truth. Not some doomsayer’s prophecy, but an inevitability that his drooping shoulders and bloodshot eyes had been screaming at him for days.

“I’ll be there,” Gideon said. Munda held out a water skin, a small comfort that Gideon took as an act of understanding. The people of Zendikar were realists, the product of a plane where survival depended on skill and will and wit. With that came a people who knew the value of the little things. A cool gulp of water rolling down a parched throat was a joy to be recognized.

Around them, Munda’s warriors were setting up camp. One of the goblins knelt over the upturned shell of a scute, working to build a modest cook fire inside it, while others stood watch or took what rest they could in the cool of the grass.

“How long has it been since you last slept?” Munda asked.

Gideon didn't know for sure. The pleasure of closing his eyes and drifting out of consciousness had eluded him for quite some time, and the comfort of a bed suddenly seemed like a distant memory. "Days," was all he could say with any degree of certainty.

"Rest for a bit," Munda said. "It looks like you could use it."

"Thanks, but not yet." Trouble *was* coming. It was here already, and it wasn't just on Zendikar.

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## Ravnica

The light drizzle that had been falling on Ravnica for more than a month did little to keep Tin Street from burning. Nor Foundry Street, when it went up the night before.



Five-Alarm Fire | Art by Karl Kopinski

"A goblin gang war's a messy thing, Jura," Dars Gostok, a captain in the Boros Legion, had said as he and Gideon watched an empty warehouse give in to the ravages of angry flames. They had risked the inferno in search of survivors, but found only the charred bodies of six goblins. "This is the first reprisal of many," the captain continued as he wiped the film of ash from his face, "and the gutters'll carry away more than just rain water in the coming days, you mark my words."

That was two days ago and, as Dars predicted, the tally of dead goblins rose.

The whole thing started with a murder—Dargig, a black market weapons runner who specialized in explosives. He had a reputation for running his mouth, but he also happened to be the youngest of the notorious Shattergang Brothers.

The way Dars explained it to Gideon, Dargig had been found in an alley off of Tin Street in a pool of blood, stabbed in the throat. Word spread that the goblin criminal kingpin, Krenko, did the deed himself when a weapons drop went bad.





Shattergang Brothers | Art by Kev Walker

The following night, a series of explosions shook the district, and several of Krenko's warehouses went up in flames. It was the Shattergang way of declaring war. And Krenko obliged all too enthusiastically. Gideon had personally petitioned the Chamber of the Guildpact to intervene, which essentially boiled down to adding his name and guild to the bottom of a very long wait list.

The Living Guildpact. Jace Beleren. Planeswalker.

The one who solved the puzzle of the Implicit Maze and became the embodiment of a magical treaty that kept Ravnica's guilds from devouring each other.

These goblins belonged to none of Ravnica's guilds. As long as it was just goblins killing goblins, most guilds were content to observe the conflict from behind the safety their guildgates.

As long as the fighting continued, the unguiled population—the gateless—was in danger.

Unacceptable.



Art by Richard Wright

It was just after midnight when the heavy iron doors of the garrison flew open, a commotion that had a dozen Boros Legionnaires shooting up from their places at the long wooden table that stretched across chamber. Some were reaching for weapons, and Gideon stood in the tall arched doorway with his wet hair clinging to his shoulders.

“At ease,” called one of the soldiers, “it’s Jura.”

“And I come bearing gifts,” said Gideon, and he shoved something into the room that had been obscured by his own silhouette. A goblin, bound at the wrists, was grinning with jagged, yellowed teeth that caught the dim lamplight. Krenko. The goblin surveyed the soldiers, his surroundings, and the soldiers again, each of whom gaped at him in disbelief.

“It’s a fine garrison, soldiers,” Krenko said, still grinning. “No Sunhome, to be sure, but it’ll do.”

Gideon limped into the chamber, his right foot leaving splotches of blood with each step.

“I’m going to assume that there’s a mess somewhere out there on your account, Jura,” said Dars who strode in from an adjoining chamber.

“I hope you didn’t like the food over at The Millennial.” The Millennial was a beyond-upscale restaurant that had been built on an exclusive observation deck of the same name. Since Krenko’s rise to power in Ravnica’s organized crime circles, he was known to spend his evenings there. So that’s where Gideon went.

“Could never get a table,” Dars replied. “I can’t imagine you found him sitting there eating dessert by himself, though.”

“Not exactly.”

“You shouldn’t have gone alone. But I have to admit that I’m impressed, and that doesn’t happen very often.”

“Don’t be too impressed.” Gideon unbuckled his greaves and rolled his right pant leg up above the knee. Gideon had tied one of the Millennial’s cloth napkins around his leg, but it was now soaked through, and was doing little to keep the wound bound. “That grinning stain stuck a shiv in my leg.”

“Twice,” Krenko said, punctuating his triumph with a wheezing laugh.

Gideon’s anger flared. “You stand here laughing while your fellow goblins die in the streets.”

Dars put a hand on his shoulder. “You should get to a surgeon.”

“Probably,” Gideon replied, but his word was swallowed up by the sound of shattering glass as a small skylight in the high ceiling burst to pieces. Gideon and Dars turned in time to see a small oblong object falling toward the ground. As it tumbled end over end, Gideon noticed a small glowing red-orange bead that dangled off of one end.

A fuse.

“Bomb!” Gideon yelled, shoving Dars aside. He grabbed the explosive before it could hit the floor, pulling in toward him until he was cradling against his abdomen. Whorls of magical, golden light erupted across the entire surface of his skin in anticipation of the blast. He crouched there, eyes clenched for a long moment.

Nothing.

Slowly, Gideon opened his eyes and looked down to find his hands gripping a glass canister topped with a brass stopper.

“Secure the area!” Dars’s command broke the silence. “I want answers!”

Gideon righted himself, turning the canister over in his hands to examine it.

“A dud?” Dars asked.

“Not a bomb. Look.” Gideon removed the stopper, and extracted a coiled ribbon of paper from the glass tube. He unrolled it. A message, scrawled with a practiced hand, stretched across narrow strip in a single line. It was meant to be clear, its message unmistakable.

Gideon read. “Krenko murdered our brother. If justice is to be done, it is ours to exact. Turn him over to us, or we will reduce Boros territory to rubble. All of you and all you love will be fair targets if you disregard this message. Is Krenko worth that much to you? You have until this time tomorrow to decide. Kindly, Rikkig, and Gardagig, the Shattergang Brothers.”

There was no time for this. Not now. Gideon had to return to Zendikar. He threw the empty canister against the stone-slab floor.

“Decision time,” Krenko taunted.

“Get him out of here,” Dars barked. “I want him behind bars.”

“You see, Jura,” Krenko said, as soldiers dragged him away, “the Boros won’t turn me in to the Shattergang Brothers. What now?”

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## **Zendikar**

Just as Munda said they would, survivors from Bala Ged landed on the coast. No more than three-hundred of them, by Gideon’s cursory count. But they weren’t the string of beaten and broken refugees Gideon had anticipated. They were fighters, hardened by what they had seen and by the people they had lost, but also resolved to continue. And as Munda said, they needed help.



But then, Gideon probably would too.

Shield scuffed, and sural unfurled, Gideon planted himself in the narrow path that twisted its way between the chalk cliffs rising up from the shore.



Plains | Art by Véronique Meignaud

The ground rumbled, and the vibrations woke the wounds that buzzed in his leg.

Stay focused. There would be time for Ravnica once this was finished.

Behind him, the survivors followed Tazri's vanguard up the path toward the open scrubland beyond. Movement above him caught Gideon's attention, and he took his eyes from the canyon floor long enough to see Munda and some of his chosen driving heavy iron spikes into the cliffs on either side, about twenty feet below the edge.

They'd have to hurry.

One of the kor on the cliffs stopped hammering suddenly and let out a shrill whistle, pointing frantically in the direction of the shore. The Eldrazi were here. He had one task—buy enough time for Munda's people to do their work. Slow the Eldrazi, destroy them—it didn't matter as long as the survivors could continue being just that.

Tazri said that there were Eldrazi experts among them heading for the Lighthouse at Sea Gate. If that was true, they had to get there.

The first of the monsters came into view where the path straightened out below. Gideon swung his sural blades back so that lay spread out behind him, poised to lash out when called upon. Here he was, between what remained of Bala Ged and a carpet of Eldrazi that raced through the canyon on countless scrabbling limbs and slick slithering tendrils.

Then they were on him.

Gideon let his sural fly, the steel ribbons extended to their full length, catching the air so that they hummed as a single razor sharp blade that cut several spawn down. He let the momentum of his swing



bring his shield to bear, punching so the shield's toothed edge bit deep into the flesh of another Eldrazi spawn.

Gideon danced away from a heavy tendril on a course to crush his skull, and he countered by sending his sural blades to coil around it. He gave his wrist a quick twist. The blades bit into the soft flesh and Gideon moved with the spawn's weight, angling for a shot with his shield. But the entire appendage fell away as though jettisoned. The sudden release pulled Gideon off balance, and the pain above his knee surged. He lost his footing, and the sural blades sprung wildly. One slid across the flesh of his cheek leaving a line of deep red from the corner of his mouth to his ear as it whipped past.

*Sloppy*, Gideon cursed himself for the mistake. But he was tired. As the blood ran warm along his jaw, he cursed himself for the excuse. He should have seen it coming. Just like he should have seen Krenko's shiv.

He had to get back to Ravnica. This was taking too long. Where was Munda?

He really had to get out of his head.

The Eldrazi spawn pressed in on him, their pale faceplates filling his vision. He looked from one to the next, each one a featureless mockery of human skulls. The sheer blankness of the faces struck Gideon as somehow contrary to thoroughness with which the Eldrazi set about their destruction. It was a pure horror to behold, lacking any semblance of humanity. They were not brutes like Gruul ogres, or sadistic like Rakdos bloodwitches. They were not recklessly dangerous like Krenko's goblins. The thought fueled Gideon, it dulled the bite of his wounds, and breathed life back into his tired limbs. He didn't have to hold back.

Don't hold back.

The sural blades flicked out again and again, Eldrazi muck thick around Gideon's boots—where dozens of spawn lay. His muscles burned. His temples pounded. And the Eldrazi fell as fast as they approached. Gideon bared his teeth, an expression that was somewhere between grimace and grin.

Three sudden sharp whistles cut through the din of the fighting. It was time, and Gideon responded with three identical whistles of his own.

Above the carnage, Gideon saw a woman step off the edge of the canyon wall that rose up on the left. She floated there for a moment, and then rose gracefully above the canyon where he extended his arms out to either side.

"I'm afraid this is where I leave you, vermin," Gideon said, spinning out of a spawn's grasp.



Staggershock | Art by Raymond Swanland

There was a blinding flash as bolts of lightning arced from the mage's fingertips, finding the iron spikes that jutted out from canyon walls. The crackling energy rode the lengths of metal into the brittle, chalky stone, exploding in a succession of deafening pops. A sound like the splintering of an enormous bone filled the canyon, and cracks erupted from the various spikes until the tops of both cliffs gave way, and sheets of white stone tumbled toward the Eldrazi below.

Gideon vaulted off the canyon wall to get clear of the Eldrazi. A heartbeat later he was sprinting up the path and out from under the falling rock. When the stone crashed, the ground jumped. Gideon couldn't keep his feet, and he was thrown hard to ground. A great cloud of pulverized stone rose up, and as it washed over him, he had to bury his face in the crook of his arm to keep from choking on it.

Gideon heard skittering. Gathering himself into a crouch, he probed the haze through squinted eyes, straining to discern shapes or movement.

No time for this. He had to get back to Ravnica.

More skittering, accompanied by the slithering squish of Eldrazi tendrils. But other sounds as well—recognizable ones. War shouts. The ringing of blades. Munda.

Gideon rose, and though the chalky dust still hung in the air, shapes and colors were reemerging. He raced forward, sural ready. But when he found Munda, the kor was tethered to a climbing line, and he was dislodging one of his hooked blades from a lifeless spawn. The whole scene was set against a backdrop of shattered stone slabs that filled the canyon floor, completely obscuring the narrow path beneath, as well as countless Eldrazi. Accompanying Munda were a dozen other kor, who were at work finishing off the remaining handful of spawn that had eluded the ambush of stone.

"Your timing couldn't have been better, my friend," Gideon said through a tired smile.

Now he could get back to Ravnica. There was still time to stop the Shattergang Brothers, but not much.

However, when Gideon saw a grimness in Munda's face that was exceptional even for his friend, his own smile faded. "What happened, Munda?"

“A great host of Eldrazi descends on Sea Gate.”

## Ravnica

Rain had saturated the bandage on his cheek and it sagged soggily, exposing the deep cut beneath. He'd have to take care of it later. There were prisoners down here somewhere. First things first.



Art by Michael Komarck

Gideon crashed into the old door. The hinges gave instantly, and he followed after the splintering wood that flew into the dark chamber beyond. The pain in his leg crescendoed with the impact, and to keep from crying out Gideon inhaled sharply. A scent that was both sweet and caustic filled his nostrils. It was the same odor that he smelled on Gardagig, when the goblin had given up the location of the Shattergang hideout.

Explosives.

Stay sharp.

“You haven’t brought Krenko with you,” came a voice, low and gravelly from behind a heavy, cluttered workbench. “Am I safe to assume that?”

“You’re not safe to do anything, Rikkig, unless you come with me right now.”

A staccato growl that Gideon took to be a laugh filled the chamber. He heard shuffling. A lantern that hung from the low ceiling revealed an awkward, bulky silhouette that Gideon didn’t understand at first. But then a discernable shape emerged. It was a figure clad in a thick, heavily padded suit. On its head was a helmet not unlike a knight’s, but with goggles fixed into the visor.

“Quite arrogant, you Boros. You pick up Krenko and try to deny us satisfaction.” He was holding something. Glass, by the way it picked up the lantern light. A bomb. And he was wearing protective armor. “Krenko will be ours, only now the district will burn for –”

No more. This had to end.

Planting his wounded leg, Gideon kicked the workbench with all the strength he could manage, sending it sliding into Rikkig with such force that the goblin's breath escaped his lungs all at once in a rattling, punctuated moan. He doubled over the workbench and the bomb flew from his grip.

Gideon moved to intercept, but his limbs were heavy and slower than usual. In slow motion, the bomb sailed past his reach, and Gideon was only able to pivot so that his body was between Rikkig and the point where the delicate glass container shattered upon the floor.

When the explosion came, golden light flared up all across the front of his body, shielding him from flying debris. The sound was momentarily absolute, drowning out all else until only a high hum hung in his ears.

Flames had sprouted all around the room.

It was difficult to focus, but he heard Rikkig coughing and struggling to unpin himself from between the workbench and the wall. Gideon spun around, jerked the workbench back, and Rikkig collapsed to the ground. Gideon stood over him.

"The Boros didn't take Krenko. I did. Just like I got your brother. And now I'm here for you."

There was a muffled wail that Gideon first thought belonged to Rikking, who was raising his hands defensively. But another wail confirmed otherwise. "Help!" The prisoners. Gideon glanced around the room until his eyes settled on a dark wooden bookcase that was filled with what Gideon assumed were bomb-making tools and ingredients. Fire was caressing its base, threatening to grab it and ignite its volatile contents. And of course, the wail he heard had come from behind it.

Reckless, he scolded himself. And stupid.

Gideon left Rikkig in a heap, and raced to the bookcase. He put his shoulder against it and pushed. Sweat collected at the end of his nose and chin, and every muscle begged for rest, but the heavy bookcase refused to yield even an inch. Gideon shut his eyes to the smoke that filled the room, and he struggled to gulp the necessary breath to continue.

His strength had begun to fail when, suddenly, the bookcase yielded and lurched forward. His eyes flew open, and Gideon saw Dars and another Boros legionnaire lending their strength to his efforts. Together, they pushed until the bookcase slid aside to reveal a narrow, round passage.

Gideon slumped against the bookcase in a fit of coughing. "Prisoners," he managed, and Boros soldiers filed past him into the passage.

Dars remained with Gideon.

"Rikkig?" Gideon asked.

The captain shook his head.

Gideon looked across the room. Rikkig was gone. His shifted his gaze to Dars. "You followed me."

"Clearly I had reason. You didn't have to do this alone, Gideon. We fight as a legion because some things are bigger than us."

"I had him, Dars."

"We'll find him. As a legion, we'll find him. You have a rest."

Not yet.

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## Zendikar

When the attack on Sea Gate came, it came crashing down on the settlement with a speed and ferocity that simply overwhelmed its militia. The Eldrazi swept in from both sides of the sea wall. Some even surged from the sea to scale the face of the sea wall itself. There were simply too many. Commander Vorik had given the signal to evacuate, but it wasn't going fast enough. But then again, neither was Gideon. Four days without sleep. Or was it five? He *did* manage close his eyes for a few minutes as he rode here from the Commander's camp. So why was he so tired?

Not now.

Gideon strained against a thick wooden beam that pinned him to the floor of a building that was crumbling around him, but it was no use. The beam had fallen across his body when an airborne Eldrazi landed a powerful swipe that sent him crashing into the building.

No time for this.

His left arm was free as well as his head, but that was it. With his teeth, he unfastened the leather straps of his buckler. Once he shook it free of his hand, he wedged it as best he could between his breastplate and the beam. It just had to budge a little, and he pushed with everything he could muster. A grunt erupted into a roar, and the beam moved. Gideon shifted his weight, and the beam rolled free of him.

Wearily, he climbed to his feet. One of the wounds above his knee had reopened—perhaps both—and blood ran down his leg. He reached for his buckler, and as he worked it back onto his left hand he scanned the ruins around him. There were bits of broken furniture strewn about along with shattered ceramic plates. This was someone's home. And this was going to be the fate of Sea Gate. He had been told that Sea Gate was the largest settlement in all of Zendikar. It was a narrow strip of civilization clinging to the top of the ancient white dam that gave Sea Gate its name, and the Eldrazi had set about reducing the settlement, and all its people, to dust.

Gideon filled his lungs and made for the crumbling doorway that led back to the carnage beyond. He was at the threshold when a figure rounded the corner, blowing past him into the building. He had to spin to one side to avoid a collision.

"Quick now, I need your help," the figure said in a manner that was more command than request. A merfolk. She was bleeding from a gash above her eye and she was holding someone, a human woman, who sagged limply in her arms. Both were clad in armor—the merfolk in the shell-like scale and plate armor that was typical of her kind, and the unconscious one in cobbled steel plate. The merfolk had a spear slung across her back. These two were not new to the horrors of the Eldrazi.

Gideon helped the merfolk lay the unconscious woman against the shattered remnants of a wall, and the two worked together to unfasten the crushed plates of that were supposed to protect her. Beneath the armor, the woman's skin was a desiccated, eroded husk that mirrored the spongy ash-colored, pitted bone texture of Eldrazi ruin. He'd seen it before. It's how the Eldrazi leeched energy from the world. It was not a wound. She died the moment the Eldrazi got to her.

The merfolk also knew what it meant, for she stopped, and sunk to the ground beside the still body, staring blankly at the devastation.

Gideon knelt. "What was her name?"

"Kendrin," she said, placing her hand on the dead woman's forehead.

"You'll have to grieve for Kendrin later. You have to get out of here now."

“You don’t understand.” She looked up, shifting her gaze from Kendrin to Gideon. “There’s no time. We barely made it out of Bala Ged alive. We saw its destruction.”

“You were among the survivors that landed yesterday.”

“Yes. Kendrin was on the brink of a discovery. The ‘puzzle of leylines,’ she called it. The hedrons. The Eldrazi. The connection—she was so close. She said it all pointed to the Eye, and that she had to come here to see the Lighthouse’s records on the Eye.”

“You just have to get to the Lighthouse? You can get your answers there?”

The merfolk shook her head. “We were just there. There’s nothing left inside. We were attacked trying to get out. Besides, Kendrin was the expert, not me. I was her escort on her expeditions...and I failed.” She slammed her fist against the stone wall, and a moment later, the whole wall seemed to explode outward over empty space. The merfolk would have tumbled backward with it over the side of the sea wall had Gideon not grabbed hold of her hand. Enormous tendrils appeared, yanking away the remaining masonry so that their source came into view—an Eldrazi monster, faceless and terrible, at the end of its ascent up the vertical expanse. Tendrils continued their devastating course, threshing stonework until only powder remained.



Ancient Stirrings | Art by Vincent Proce

Gideon and the merfolk scrambled up a pile of rubble that had once been a second and third floor. From their position, Gideon could see the devastation that stretched out from one end of the sea wall to the other. Many of the buildings were in ruins, and many more had been pulled completely from the top of the wall so that the water on both sides ground the wreckage against the wall’s smooth face.

The Zendikari were a resilient lot, and even now, he saw that many continued to fight in defensive pockets. They had been destroying Eldrazi all day, but it wasn’t enough. The truth of it was Sea Gate was lost. This approach was not enough.



Pathrazer of Ulamog | Art by Goran Josic

But perhaps it was as she said, though—Kendrin found an answer. The puzzle of leylines. The notion smoldered within Gideon, and suddenly burst into flames. Fighting to avoid something was not the same as fighting for something. Kendrin’s puzzle was a possible answer. That was enough for now.

They just needed another expert.

“What’s your name?” Gideon asked as they leapt to either side of a tendril that smashed down between them.

“Really? Now?”

“I’m going to find someone who can help. But I’ll need to find you after.”

She threw her spear at the Eldrazi as it slowly pulled itself over the edge of the wall into the broken dwelling. The spear found its mark with a crunch, sinking into the featureless faceplate. The Merfolk’s eyes flash fleetingly with red energy, and the wound she opened began to hiss and steam. “I’m Jori En,” she said through gritted teeth as tendrils flailed about furiously.

“Jori En, get to Commander Vorik’s camp. You have to make it. I’ll find you.”

And the next moment Gideon’s sural blades flew, grabbing hold of Jori En’s spear, which had remained lodged in place. He hurled himself into the air, and at the apex of the swing he hit the toggle on his forearm to trigger the retraction mechanism of his sural. But instead reeling in his blades, the force



jerked him toward Jori's spear and he rammed into the Eldrazi's face with such force that it was carried over the edge and back toward the sea below.

In a tangle of tendrils, Gideon fell with it.

Stay focused.

He had to get free of the Eldrazi, or it would drag him beneath the surface. His hands fumbled at the sural blades, attempting to release them from spear, but the Eldrazi was tumbling through the air fast, and Gideon lost his grip. He was free falling, but still anchored to the Eldrazi, and all he could do was ready himself for impact.

The Eldrazi hit first, and Gideon's entire body erupted in bands of golden light as he too crashed through the surface of the sea. The Eldrazi fell to pieces instantly, and Gideon was tossed around beneath the churning water. He struggled to orient himself in the midst of the slurry of sea water and Eldrazi bits.

At last he surfaced, gulping for air. With the last of his strength, he kicked his way over to the collection of detritus that lined the base of the wall. He found the remnant of a wooden table, and clung to it. From above, the sounds of slaughter could be heard over the surf and he tilted his head up to where Eldrazi swarmed over Sea Gate like angry ants. Gideon knew he had no time to waste.

He had an expert to find.

He closed his eyes, and he felt the world around him melt away. The coldness of the sea faded and he felt stone beneath his feet. The sound of lapping waves gave way to the din of the city. Sounds he knew. Sounds of Ravnica.

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## **Ravnica**

Bruised and bloodied, Gideon stood at the bottom of the flight of stone steps that led to the Chamber of the Guildpact. Zendikar was still in peril. Force of arms alone would not be enough to achieve victory. There had to be some other answer. Was it, as Jori said, the puzzle of leylines? Who then was better suited for the task than the one who solved Ravnica's maze?

The Living Guildpact.

The Planeswalker, Jace Beleren.

Gideon ascended the first step, tried for another, but gravity had him, and he collapsed.