

Episode 8: Gods of Chaos

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From set *Murders at Karlov Manor*

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The sun rose bright and beautiful over the moor, shining through every blade of grass and glinting off every drop of dew. It was a glorious morning, the sort of day that appeared filled with promise and glory, with absolutely no chance of shadows lurking around the edges to snare and engulf. Kaya stood on the porch of Vitu-Ghazi, squinting at that flawless sky, and wondered when she'd lost the ability to appreciate something as simple as a sunrise. It wasn't that she couldn't tell that it was lovely. It was more ...

It was more that so much of the plane—of the *planes*—had shown itself to be unspeakably and irreparably broken that something as beautiful as the morning sun felt less like a promise and more like another lie layered on top of all the others.

A coach pulled by a pair of winged horrors stopped at the curb, and Kaya stepped off the porch to meet it. It was painted matte black with bloody trim; even without the guild symbol on the door, she would easily have been able to identify this as the carriage of the Rakdos representative. The door swung open, and Judith stepped out, resplendent in a long red velvet dress, trimmed in black and topped by a black leather bodice that gleamed like burnished steel in the early light. She wrinkled her nose as she looked first one way and then the other, finally focusing on Kaya.

"When I was *summoned* like some *lackey*, I'll admit I expected a more impressive welcoming committee," she said, a sneer in her voice.

Kaya didn't rise to the bait. "The request was for the head of the guild to come receive essential information regarding the recent murders," she said. "As you're not Rakdos, you were under no obligation to attend."

"Yes, well, His Viciousness is somewhat too preoccupied preparing for war against the rest of Ravnica to attend your little soiree," said Judith, waving Kaya's words away. "Although it seems fitting that this little drama should begin *and* end with an Orzhov attempt at entertainment. Who are you going to kill to keep us all amused today?"



Art by: Aldo Dominguez

“No one, unless you keep testing me,” said Kaya, keeping her tone pleasant. “Aurelia and Lavinia are already inside, if you’d like to go join them.”

“While you stay out here to play greeter? How adorable.” Judith’s smile was a razor blade, sharp enough to slice through flesh to find the bone beneath. She swept past Kaya without another word, leaving her alone on the porch. The carriage drove away, horrors trotting in eerie unison. Kaya rolled her eyes. That was Judith. She would probably find a way to choreograph her own deathbed for maximum dramatic impact. Bladders of blood attached to the ceiling or something.

Kaya was still standing there, contemplating the horrors of Judith’s eventual, meticulously orchestrated death, when a great shadow swept across her. She looked up, taking a half-step back, and watched as Ezrim came gliding in for a landing, offering her a polite nod. He pulled a small chariot behind him, occupied by a centaur in Gruul colors.

The centaur exited the chariot once they were safely on the ground, undoing the buckle that had kept him from falling out. Kaya turned, offering a small half-bow to Ezrim.

“Sir,” she said, and then, as she turned to face his companion, “Yarus, I presume.”

“Message said you wanted the Gruul leader,” said the centaur, still looking unsettled by his recent flight. “We don’t have a leader, but I speak high enough to stand for us here. And I was with this one,” he hooked a finger toward Ezrim, “when the note came in, so he said this was as good as keeping me in custody.”

“Yarus didn’t release Anzrag from the evidence capsule,” said Ezrim.

“Would’ve, if I’d thought of a way how,” said Yarus.

“And he didn’t know who had, although he’s grateful that you were able to recapture the god without killing him,” continued Ezrim.

“Don’t like him being a captive, but it’s better than dead. Thought for sure you civilized folk would put him down if you had the chance,” said Yarus, with something verging on grudging respect. “You didn’t, and your man here explained what has to happen before we can have him back with us, unharmed and uncontained. But you could’ve killed him, and you didn’t, and for that, you have my respect.”

“You’re welcome,” said Kaya, amazed.

Ezrim, meanwhile, moved closer, looming over her. “Now, *Agent*, care to explain why you think you have the authority to summon me?”

“All will be explained shortly, sir,” said Kaya. “If you would just proceed inside, we’re going to get started soon.”

Ezrim gave her a measuring look. “This isn’t like you.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

“Who put this together?”

“Inside, sir. You’ll have the information soon.” *And so will I.*

With one last, inscrutable look, Ezrim paced through the wide double doors, making Kaya question again how the archon got around when faced with buildings constructed to a more human scale. Most civic establishments accounted for the varying sizes of the population, but surely his job took him to private homes on occasion? Narrow tunnels? Places that weren’t expecting to accommodate a massive feathered steed?

No point in dwelling on it. Vitu-Ghazi was large enough, and she still had people to greet. Kaya waved Yarus after Ezrim, then turned her eyes back to the road.

Not much longer now.

Vannifar was the last of the guild leaders to arrive, shortly after Ral, who had paused before going inside to give Kaya a look so sympathetic that it had caused her stomach to briefly lurch, like everything she’d eaten since arriving in the city was going to make an appearance right then and there. Teysa had been his friend, too. More than anyone else on Ravnica, he understood how much she’d lost, both before and after Teysa died. They’d never been close, but here was someone who understood her, all the way to the base of who she was, and it was almost a crime that they didn’t have time to talk.

But then he’d been stepping inside, and Vannifar had been climbing out of her coach, a sour expression on her face, and Kaya had been thrust back into the role she’d agreed to play in this morning’s little performance.

Proft better know what he’s doing, she thought sourly and moved to greet Vannifar.

Only one guest was expected after that: Krenko, the goblin hustler she’d seen speaking with Teysa at the party. Why *he* was included in the invitations was just one of the many things Proft hadn’t been willing, or perhaps able, to disclose.

Once Krenko arrived, Kaya ushered him through the doors of Vitu-Ghazi and closed them behind her with a satisfying thump. “This way,” she said, beckoning for him to follow as she started down the hall toward Trostani’s sanctum.

“Who else is, eh, here?” he asked, clearly anxious.

If Proft had summoned him, he probably had reason to be. “Quite a few people,” said Kaya. “Most of the guild leadership—we’re only missing Golgari and Dimir, for hopefully obvious reasons—yourself, Agent Kellan from the Agency, Captain Ezrim from the Agency, and Tolsimir.”

“So if whoever’s been hunting guild leaders wanted to finish the job in a hurry, all they’d need to do is hit Vitu-Ghazi?”

Kaya fixed Krenko with a stern look. “You know, it’s only because you sound unhappy about that that I’m not detaining you right now. Aurelia is in the building. You could be under arrest in a matter of seconds.”

“You can’t talk to me like that. I have a pardon!” said Krenko, glowering at her. “Can you really blame me for being concerned over my own safety?”

“I doubt there’s any place on Ravnica safer than right here,” Kaya said and opened the door to Trostani’s sanctum, which had been turned into their makeshift gathering place for today’s salon. It was large enough, but even so, with every chair occupied and every corner filled with unhappy murmurs, it certainly seemed to be at capacity. Even Trostani herself looked displeased, her arms twined together and complementary, if not identical, frowns on all three of her faces.



Art by: Evyn Fong

Everyone turned toward Kaya and Krenko as the door closed behind them. Aurelia was the first to move, rising with a flurry of feathers from the leather armchair she’d been occupying and demanding, “What is the *meaning* of this?” The chain connecting her to Massacre Girl—the captive who she had insisted on bringing, presumably to throw in the faces of the others there—jerked the assassin an inch forward.

“You didn’t have to come,” said Kaya.

“Hear that? We could’ve stayed home,” said Massacre Girl before a savage jerk on her chain quieted her. Judith very pointedly looked away.

“When someone says they want us to attend to hear more about the deaths of our colleagues, yes, we had to,” said Vannifar. “The Agency has been entirely incompetent, and only the fact that the Boros have somehow managed to be even worse makes this anything other than a farce.”

Aurelia’s wings mantled, and she began to open her mouth, preparing to say something that Kaya was sure would shatter the fragile peace in the room. Time seemed to stretch, the moment lasting longer than causality could explain, and into the silence created by her horrified pause, a new sound emerged. Clapping.

Kaya turned to see Detective Proft stepping out of a shadow that couldn’t possibly have concealed him for this long, clapping slowly and rhythmically, eyes fixed on Aurelia.

“I told Etrata I could set an egg timer by how long it would take you to lose your temper once we were all here, and I wish to thank you for earning me three zinos,” he said. “I know she’s good for it.”

“In your dreams,” said a voice from the other side of the room. Etrata had likewise emerged from the shadows and was leaning against the back of a chair, arms crossed, looking amused. “You can make all the bets you want. They won’t count unless I agree to them.”

“Uh-uh-uh, pedantry is the hallmark of a narrow mind,” said Proft.

Ezrim, meanwhile, had turned to Etrata, eyes narrowed. “Give me one good reason not to detain you and hand you over to the Azorius right now,” he said. “I’m sure Lavinia would be delighted to have you back in her custody.”

“Very much so,” said Lavinia, pinching each syllable off until it became almost its own sentence.

“Ah, but I’m afraid you’ll both have your hands full with the *real* architect of our current conundrum,” said Proft smugly. “Etrata *did* break out of Azorius custody, and technically, that could be considered a crime. However, as she was being unlawfully detained at the time, I believe you’ll find the Guildpact exempts her from any consequence for that action. If we wanted to be able to punish people for getting a little egg on our faces, I suppose we should have asked Azor to word that better. I’ll be sure to discuss it with him if he ever makes it back.”

“What do you mean?” Ezrim asked, even as Aurelia demanded, “What are you talking about?” and Lavinia said, “You can’t be serious.”

Their voices layered together, almost like Trostani’s. Trostani herself remained silent, watching everything unfold with worried eyes.

“Ah,” said Proft. “All will soon be made clear. I simply need to ask each of you a few questions before I can explain the full situation.”

“Why should we allow it?” asked Ral.

“Because your answers will provide the final pieces of this puzzle, and save many Ravnican lives,” said Proft with utter calm.

“Very well,” said Ezrim. “As you have clearly roped my investigators into your scheme and convinced them to organize this assembly on your behalf, I suppose we can give you a bit of our time. And if you fail to satisfy everyone here, I suppose you’ll be happy to give me back your badge.”

“It won’t come to that,” said Proft confidently. “I’ll need to speak to each of you privately, but I can give you this assurance: our killer is here with us, in this very room.”

Murmurs and anxious glances followed this declaration. Krenko was the first to speak, demanding, “So why did you call us all here? Why lead us to the middle of nowhere to tell us we’ve been locked in with a murderer? You know *I* didn’t do it. Why am *I* here?”

“Because this concerns you as well,” said Proft. “You all know someone here is guilty, which means none of you will allow anyone to leave. As to why we’re in the middle of nowhere, well, our killer is a dangerous individual. Who knows how they might react when their treachery is revealed? Out here, we’re far from civilians and crowds. Ravnica has seen enough casualties recently.”

Arguments erupted from all around the room. Kaya watched the so-called leading lights of Ravnica as they fought and protested like children, weariness spreading through her. She just wanted to go somewhere quiet and be done with this. Kaldheim. When all this was over, she was going to go to Kaldheim and let Tyvar take her on that fishing trip he’d been threatening. She would stand in freezing water up to her thighs and watch the rainbow lights paint pictures in the sky, and she wouldn’t be in a place where her friends kept dying, and she wouldn’t have to listen to people she respected fighting as if all that mattered was their inconvenience.

Finally, Ezrim snapped his wings open with a sound like tearing silk and shouted, “*QUIET!*” into the tumult. Silence fell, and everyone turned to stare at him. Most looked annoyed; Ral and Judith looked almost amused. Trostani and Aurelia looked resigned.

“What is it?” asked Vannifar.

“We’re already here,” said Ezrim. “We’re here, we want this to end, and these people were tasked and authorized to investigate. I want to hear what my detective has to say.”

“I’m alive, but one of my inventors is not,” said Ral. “Izzet allows it.”

“Azorius doesn’t stand in the path of justice,” said Lavinia. “We allow it as well.”

One by one, the guild leaders chimed in with their acquiescence, until Kaya realized Ezrim was looking at her. She held up her hands. “Hey, I’m not in charge of the Syndicate anymore!”

“Teysa had no named second in command, and as she has not yet returned from beyond to express her wishes in the matter of succession, we have no one to speak for the guild if you refuse,” said Trostani, breaking her long silence. “The Guildpact permits you to consent on Orzhov’s behalf.”

It would have been nice if Niv-Mizzet, who embodied the Guildpact, could have made an appearance while his people were dying. Kaya sighed before saying, sourly, “Fine, then. I want this to be over. You have the Syndicate’s consent.”

“And House Dimir’s, if that matters,” said Etrata.

“As the Swarm has not sent a representative—”

“Oh, but we have,” said Izeni, melting out of the shadows. “The Golgari approve.”

If Proft was surprised by her appearance, he did an admirable job of not showing it. Expression serene, he said, “We are in agreement, then?”

“No,” said Krenko. “I don’t want to be left alone in here with some mystery assassin while you interrogate someone else. A lot of people have reasons for wanting me dead. This is just making it easy on them.”

“Agent Kellan and Captain Ezrim will both be present,” said Proft. “You’ll be safer here than you would be in your own home.”

“Doesn’t say much for the safety of his home,” drawled Judith, amusement growing.

“Regardless, as I now have permission to proceed, I will begin my interviews with our lady Planeswalker.” Proft turned to Kaya. “If you would accompany me?”

“I can’t ask anyone else to do what I refuse to do myself, so absolutely,” she said. “Tolsimir? Is there a place where we might speak in private?”

“Of course,” said Tolsimir. “Selesnya provides for our guests.”

He walked to the doors, pushing them open, and beckoned the pair to follow him into the hall, where he led the way to a smaller door.

“This will be perfect,” said Proft. “Thank you.”

“The Conclave is happy to assist in your investigation,” he said and turned, leaving them.

The room they had been led to was small and somewhat shabby, filled with furniture that had probably been moved from elsewhere in the manor, pressed into a final use before it was scrapped or recycled into something else. “Is it odd to anyone else that Vitu-Ghazi has decided to be a ... fancy house during its recovery?” asked Kaya, sitting. “I would have expected something larger.”

Proft made a noncommittal noise as he settled across from her, folding his hands in his lap. Kaya adjusted her position, getting comfortable, and waited for him to say something. Proft, uncharacteristically, stayed silent. Blinking, Kaya did the same.

The silence stretched out between them, growing longer and longer, hanging in the air like an unanswered question. Kaya squirmed. Proft didn’t move, remaining exquisitely still as a corpse.

The comparison made Teysa’s open, unseeing eyes flash through her memory, and Kaya stiffened. “What are we doing?” she asked, voice sharp.

“Waiting,” said Proft.

“Waiting for *what*?”

Before Proft could answer, something moved on the wall to Kaya’s left. Already tense from the long silence, she shifted away from it, automatically falling into a fighting stance, one hand on the dagger at her belt. The movement proved to be a white, wormlike root, uncurling from the pattern in the wallpaper, spiraling into a thicker base.

That base swelled and expanded, becoming a bud the color of a bone-deep bruise. It began to open, petals spreading delicately wide, and for half a heartbeat, it seemed as if the flower were taking a breath.

Proft clamped a clear glass evidence jar over the flower just as it began to emit a puff of yellow-gray dust. Pollen, or spores of some kind.

“Would you be so kind?” he asked, gesturing toward her dagger with his free hand.

Kaya blinked and rose, pulling the dagger and leaning over to slide it under the edge of the jar, smoothly slicing the entire flower off the wall and into the waiting receptacle. Proft sat back in his chair, snapping a lid onto the jar. A flash of blue-white energy suffused the glass, finally identifying it as a field evidence collection container. Its contents would remain in stasis until they were needed.

Proft stood. “As I had hoped; we’re finished here,” he said with a polite nod to Kaya. “Thank you for your assistance, and for helping me to avenge your friend.”

Utterly baffled, Kaya followed him back into the hall. “Were you planning to tell me what that was all about?”

"I'm planning to tell *everyone* what that was all about. Who committed these terrible crimes, why Etrata and any others accused are innocent under Ravnican law, and how we can bring this terrible chapter in our city's history to a conclusion." He flashed her a tight smile. "You wouldn't rob a hard-working detective of his opportunity to gloat, now would you?"



Art by: Quintin Gleim

"As long as you're going to explain."

"Oh, believe me, there is nothing I want more," said Proft, opening the door back to Trostani's private study.

Not much had changed inside. Kellan was sitting in the chair Kaya had vacated and stood quickly as she returned, gesturing for her to join him.

"I miss anything?" she asked.

"Lavinia and Krenko had a little spat. He said the Senate made his toughs look like gentlemen and told her to rearrest Etrata if she wanted to do something useful; Aurelia reminded him that Etrata's a known assassin; he went back to his corner," said Kellan dutifully. "Oh, and Massacre Girl bit Yarus. Other than that, nothing. What happened with Proft?"

"Show's about to start," she replied. "Quiet. I want to hear what he hasn't been telling us."

Kellan fell silent as she sat, and they watched Proft stride to the middle of the room. He held up his jar, turning so that everyone would have a chance to see, before putting it theatrically down in the middle of a small, round refreshment table. "I'm sure you're all still wondering why I requested these fine representatives of the Agency call you here today," he said.

"I'm more curious about why you've been running around the city with a fugitive," said Aurelia.

"I have the same question," said Lavinia. "Also, how did she get out of our custody? Those locks are supposed to be secure."

Proft ignored that, pressing ahead with his presentation. "We have multiple suspects in the matter of multiple killings. Zegana of the Simic Combine; Teysa of the Orzhov Syndicate; Kylox of the Izzet League." He glanced at Ral. "My apologies on the loss of one of your own. A further attempt was made on the life of Warleader Aurelia of the Boros Legion—but the attack on her carried a note of similarity to the attack on Zegana. In both cases, a known assassin of a guild whose relations with the rest of Ravnica were under strain was identified as the attacker, and in both cases, the supposed killer had no memory of the incident."

"Or so they'd like us to think," said Aurelia.

"Why would a Dimir assassin have been so overt, or so easily caught? And how could she then fool a verity circle with no time to prepare?" asked Proft. "Which is easier to believe, that she's telling the truth, or that our entire system of justice is somehow fallible?"

"I know which I'd prefer," said Ral.

"Continue," said Ezrim.

Proft nodded to him. "I was informed of the escape of the Gruul god within Agency headquarters—an escape which occurred as the primary investigative team was growing close to a set of answers, one which might have led them to the killer's trail. Yarus had no means of releasing Anzrag."

"Would've done it well sooner if I had," said Yarus.

"Indeed," said Proft. "For the Gruul god to be freed, someone would have had to access the evidence locker. Someone with clearance and the ability to open very tightly warded locks. As I looked at the pieces of the puzzle, I realized what mattered wasn't the scene of the crime—it was the last place each of our killers remembered being before the event occurred. Krenko was attacked by someone with no motivation for murder who had been going to the florist before returning home. Etrata had been in her private chambers, a place where she felt safe in relaxing her guard. According to Kaya, Teysa's killer had no memory between walking through the Eighth District on an errand and finding himself covered in Guildmaster Karlov's blood. The loss of memory is the connecting thread. It can't be something as simple as a blow to the head or a normal intoxication. I could accept a Dimir assassin controlling their own mind well enough to conceal the memory, but several untrained civilian killers? No."

"Do you always take this long to get to the point?" asked Judith.

"Ah, Judith," said Proft, pivoting to face her. "I did wonder how long you would allow me to leave you out of this discussion. You've been trying, desperately, to throw blame on your own parun at every step along the way. Admirable, if not for the fact that your ambition might have allowed the real architect of these killings to continue unhindered. Rakdos is no more responsible for this than I am."

"Oh, so you're admitting guilt now?" Judith studied her nails.

Proft turned back to Ezrim. "After Etrata explained her lack of memory to me, I realized she wasn't guilty under Ravnican law. Mind control is never held against the person manipulated in such a manner. I accompanied her to her quarters, where I found a strange powder. Izeni of the Golgari examined it on my behalf, and she was able to verify that while it is natural in origin, it comes from no flower or fungus that grows naturally on Ravnica. She raised the question of Phyrexian involvement, which I was forced to consider, as it would explain a great deal—but fails to explain so much more. I thought further, and a theory began to develop, one which was only strengthened by the information Kaya and Agent Kellan had been able to collect, which they generously shared with me. Still, I needed proof,

which Kaya has just helped me to obtain. This flower.” He lifted the jar again, holding it up to fix everyone’s attention in the right place.

“This flower is *not* Phyrexian in origin. It shares none of the attributes of their terrible creations, and while I believe it to have unnatural origins, now that it exists, it is a fully natural thing, one which may well plague us for years if it successfully takes root and spreads. I knew that if I came here and declared that I was on the cusp of unraveling the mystery I would make a target of myself, and our killer would have no choice but to attempt to eliminate me at once. They depend on secrecy to continue their terrible work. Announcing my intent to interview you all was a ruse. By selecting a famous interplanar assassin as my first interview, I presented the perfect opportunity to strike. Who better to kill me and flee the scene, only to be so ashamed of her actions that she could never return to Ravnica?”



Art by: Justyna Dura

He paused to take a breath, allowing the moment to lengthen dramatically before he continued: “We know, through simple logic, that the substance has limitations. It can only be used to subvert the will of an individual once. Otherwise, our killer would surely have seized Etrata again. She’s a known assassin, already implicated in the case, and for her to be found crouching over my body—”

“As if I’d have been found,” said Etrata.

“—would have condemned her without question. But when I was attacked in her presence, it was by another killer, one hired through more ordinary means. I was thus fully confident that Etrata, who is known to have been afflicted once, would be able to protect the rest of you while I waited for our killer to attempt to seize Kaya and aim her in my direction.” Proft turned to Tolsimir, nodding respectfully. “Only one guild has the botanical skills to create something of this nature, *and* the respect for the

balance of nature to make its effects limited in scope. This is a creation of the Conclave. Our killer is a member of the Selesnya. Once we accept that simple reality, everything else begins to fall together.

“The roots of Vitu-Ghazi spread throughout the city. No crack, no crevice, no corner is concealed from the great tree. It’s a perfect mechanism to deliver something as natural and inobtrusive as a flower anywhere in Ravnica. They grow quickly, seize control of their victims for long enough to allow the true mastermind of these murders to execute their plans, and then they wither, vanishing, untraceable. They were even able to sprout one of their flowers inside Agency headquarters, compelling one of our own agents to release Anzrag from the evidence locker, which I was able to verify by asking one of my contacts to check the area for traces of the pollen. Anything to keep us pointing fingers away from Selesnya and at each other.”

Proft stopped, still looking at Trostani. She said nothing, only continued looking back, the expressions on her three faces completely out of alignment. Ses glared, narrow-eyed and furious. Cim, in contrast, was wide-eyed and horrified. Oba looked almost serene, like she was detached from the situation.

“You can’t be serious,” said Aurelia.

“Mind control *would* absolve the attackers of their actions, but can we really trust a Golgari leader to have given us accurate information?”

“You left us alone with an assassin because you thought we’d be *safer*?” demanded Krenko. “You say Vitu-Ghazi was used to push these flowers through the city, so you brought us to Vitu-Ghazi. You must be a *real* genius, pal.”

“I had to, if I wanted to put our killer at sufficient ease to draw them out.” Proft turned to Lavinia. “As Etrata was arrested without cause, I committed no crimes in releasing her to assist me. Are we agreed?”

“It’ll take months to clear the paperwork, and I’m not happy about it, but yes, we’re agreed,” said Lavinia.

“Then all that remains is for our killer to step forward and face their punishment.”

“I did it,” said Tolsimir, shifting away from the wall where he’d been leaning. “I sent my most faithful to confront the Agency lackeys after they came here to consult the Guildpact. I didn’t want to risk the Planeswalker shaking off the compulsion before she could kill the fey.”

“Noble of you to try to take the burden of blame onto yourself, but you didn’t do this,” said Proft. “You lack the abilities, sadly. And those assailants were ‘your’ most faithful only in the sense that you share their adherence to the cause. That plant they swallowed, transforming themselves to moss, was well beyond your capacity to create. I can see a leaf of the same plant protruding from your jacket pocket. You came here prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of protecting the true killer.”

Proft turned again, to Trostani this time, and inclined his head respectfully. “Do you wish to tell them, or shall I?” he asked.

“Tell us what?” asked Vannifar.

“Oh, that she’s the killer, of course.” Proft swiveled to face the rest of the room, beaming broadly, a man who had finally been allowed to do the one thing which brought him true satisfaction. “Weren’t you listening? Trostani did this, all of it. She’s been behind it all along.”