

The Burying, Part 2

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From set *Gatecrash*

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To be close to the Old Gods, you must go under the earth. There you will hear their voices and feel their power. Some may whisper sacred words to you, some may give you visions, some may fill you with fear, but it is their way of making you whole, of making you a real person who knows his own heart. Do not fear.



Domri Rade was entombed in the earth.

After Domri was covered in magical symbols and an animal skin shroud, the shaman Sabast laid him in the ceremonial grave. As Domri felt the earth piled on top of him he heard Sabast begin a chant of protection. It kept Domri's body alive, but his mind was unprotected, exposed, and alone.

Sound became muffled with each shovelful of dirt. The cold slowly seeped into his body. The weight made it harder to move. Then he was in total darkness and silence. Teenage bravado buoyed him for the first initial moments, and he knew all he had to do was endure the night and in the morning Sabast would be there to dig him out.



Skarrg Guildmage | Art by Aleksí Briclot

All he had to do was last.

But any measure he had of the passage of time gradually began slipping away from him. An eternity seemed to pass as his mind systematically exhausted its defenses one by one. Eventually, he ran out of things to occupy his thoughts.

Then the deeper layers began to surface. Darker layers.

Was it minutes? Was it hours? Maybe Sabast was taken by a maaka on his way back to camp and no one will know where I am? Would the protection spell wear off? Would I suffocate? Maybe there was a massive Rakdos attack on my tribe and everyone was wiped out.

Maybe I'd always be alone.

Maybe I am going to die here.

He knew the Old Gods were a myth—something the elders believed in. But now, as cracks of uncertainty began to appear in his mental armor, he felt his mind rushing to cling to them, to make them real, to beg them for deliverance from this fear. His thoughts and emotions raced like rats in a trap, feeding on each other until his mind shut down and blind instinct took over. Domri struggled like a drowning man but his body was pinned in the earth. Frozen. Immobile.

An overwhelming panic set in... and then something began to take over. A pressure from within surged up through his body, sending a sound through his mind like a chorus of trumpets that threatened to tear him apart. His spine felt like it had turned to liquid fire and his head filled with light and then... it happened. He shot out into the Multiverse to behold the infinite void of the Blind Eternities. Its vastness was incomprehensible to his new eyes—eyes that would never be closed again.

All the planes of the Multiverse lay before him like facets of a sparkling jewel.

Domri awoke in what felt like a Gruul steam tent. He picked himself up off of the spongy ground covered in leaf litter. Things smelled differently. He sat up and rubbed his eyes and viewed a world never before seen by a Gruul.

His mind could barely process the lack of buildings as he staggered to his feet—no stone, no rubble, nothing. He blinked and shook his head but the scene didn't change. Buildings didn't magically appear. He was deep within a primordial rainforest; massive trees covered with lush mosses, ferns, and bromeliads surrounded him. Plants he had never seen before burst in a riot of life all about him. He shuffled in a daze to a break in the trees and there he beheld a deep valley carpeted in the endless, green canopy of a vast jungle far below. Not a building or ruin in sight.



Forest | Art by Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai

“Krokt.” The word escaped his mouth as he gazed in complete wonder at a horizon teeming with unchecked growth. A feeling began to well up within him, as if his Gruul ancestors were chanting in exultation. He was looking at the land of their hopes and dreams—a land without walls, structure, or the blasted Azorius and their scribbling books. This was raw life expressing absolute freedom, and he was in the thick of it. An ululation from some primal part of Domri's being erupted out of him in response to his ancestors' joy.

He yelled at the top of his lungs, “Yeeeeeeaaaaahhhhhh!”

Maybe not so great an idea.

He heard an unfamiliar bellow shake every bone in his body. Darting past him came three elves in strange garb, each one looking more surprised and worried than the one before as they fled past him.



Sages of the Anima | Art by Kev Walker

The first elf glared. “Idiot!”

The second elf ran past. “Idiot!”

As she dashed past him, the last elf said, “Run, you idiot!”

He could feel the earth as it shook under his feet. Something big crashed through the trees, and their trunks and roots groaned as they snapped. Domri sprang into action. He lowered his head and ran after the incredibly fleet feet of the elf girl as she darted through the obstacle course of hanging vines and fallen limbs.

Trees crashed all around him, and he quickly lost sight of the elves as he ran blindly through the endless sea of ferns and leaves. As he ran past a wall of vines, two hands shot out, grabbed him, and pulled him into a dark cave. He could hear the elves breathing.

“Don’t say a word.” One of the elves whispered.

“Idiot.” Another said.

“I don’t want to go back,” Domri said to his three elf companions who looked at him with a mixture of bewilderment and fascination. “This place is amazing.”

The three elves sat and looked at this bedraggled boy, covered in dirt, ash, and ochre symbols of some strange tribe unknown to them, babbling about crossing a great void from another realm. Their elder, Hasal, talked to the stranger while the two younger elves watched him curiously from a distance.

“He’s mad,” Maklo whispered to Elishta.

“He’s got power. I can feel it. Perhaps Cylia has sent him to help us track the gargantuans.”

“I think he’s just another scout who got lost in the forest and ate too many spinberries.”

Hasal knew the human was not from any tribe he knew of nearby. Most human travelers—be they drumhunters or simple traders—moved in groups through the jungle, and no one went alone this far. Even Cylian godtrackers, such as themselves, were careful not to get separated this deep in the forest. This human, Hasal decided, was out of his head.

Hasal quietly asked questions of the boy, trying to make sense of his outlandish claims, but the more questions he asked, the more Domri came out with wild details of a world he called Ravnica.

Domri sat in bewildered glee as he stared at the lush, endless forest as the elves conferred with each other. After a moment of whispers and over-the-shoulder glances Hasal said, “Our anima will wish to talk to you. Tell me again of this place you come from. You spoke of an entire world of... buildings?”

“Yes. Where I come from, all people do is destroy nature and make buildings from it. My tribe destroys their stuff and gives it back to nature.”



Stomping Ground | Art by David Palumbo

Maklo looked doubtful. Elishta looked enthralled.

Hasal just looked. *This kid is hallucinating.*

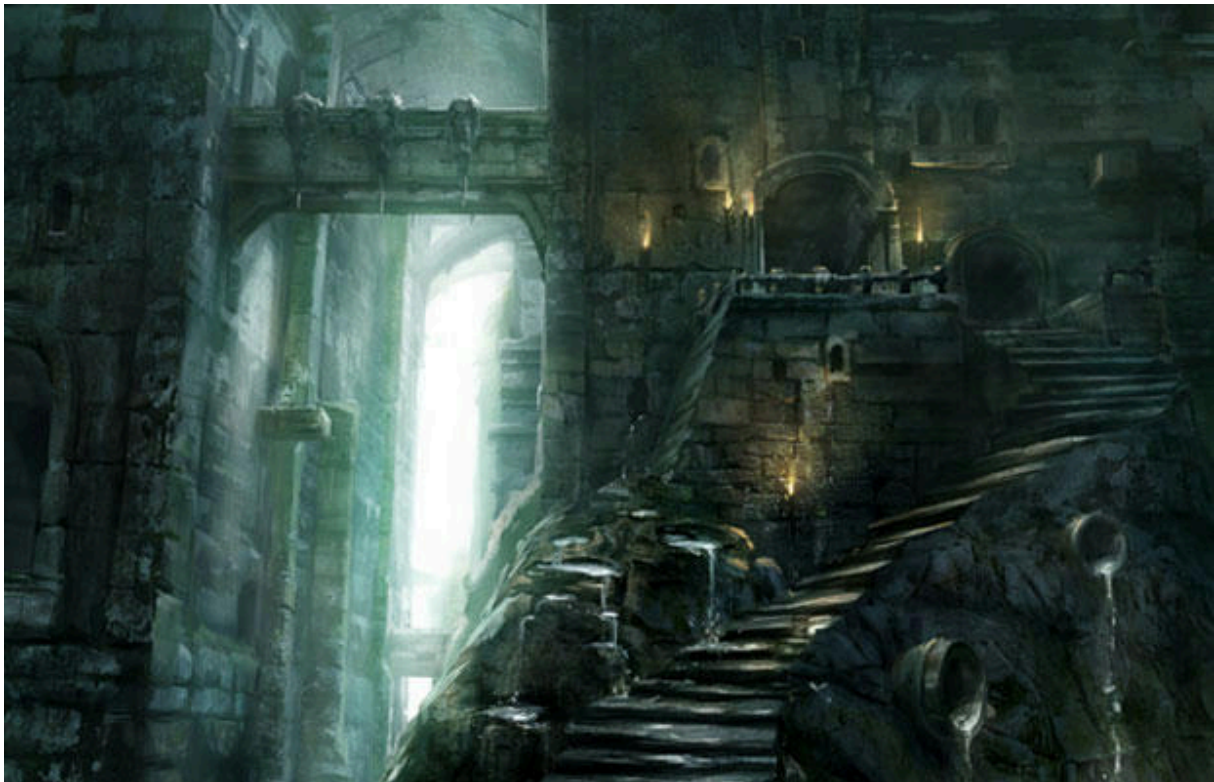
Domri rambled on, the adrenaline from the Planeswalk and then being chased by Krokt-knows-what was flowing through his body; his eyes were like saucers as he talked to the elves. “I mean, imagine if every tree here was a building of some sort and the spaces between them were cobbled alleyways. That’s Ravnica. It’s a horrible mess and we Gruul just want to tear it down, but the Azorius and all the other guilds fight us. They’re all caught up in rules and laws, but we have the Rubblebelt. That’s my home. I love the creatures that live there.”

As Domri jabbered at the bewildered elves, he started to imagine the Rubblebelt and the great swaths of ruins, caves, and trenches left by wars, beasts, and other devastations. It pulled on him and he felt

a strong force begin to arise like a fire within a furnace. The more Domri thought about it, the more the force grew within him, until a dam burst and he felt a tremendous rush of mana overtake him like a ragebeast. It was chaotic. It felt like a swirling storm of earth tangled with trees and vines. Domri began to sweat as the stress of this new vision overtook him. It was as if he was buried in the ground again. Deep in the earth, roots snaked through his body and dissolved his flesh into until nothing but his bones remained. Then those too were crushed into the void. He could faintly hear Hasal calling his name, and he could feel his physical body being shaken as if it was someone else's, but his awareness was elsewhere.

And then, in a sickening lurch of unbelievable power, he shot out into the Blind Eternities once more.

The streets of Ravnica at midnight can be a confusing place, especially for a Gruul who had never set foot so deep within the city. Domri had to sneak blindly through what seemed like miles of alleyways and streets before he could find a familiar spire, a familiar hole in the district's wall, and a familiar trail that led back to the Rubblebelt and his tribe's camp.



Forest | Art by Yeong-hao Han

It was late night when he stumbled in, scraggly, drained of energy, looking like some kind of sewer shambler that crawled out of a Gulgari drainpipe.

"Aieeee!" Within a split-second, four Gruul warriors had their spears at his throat.

"It's me, Domri. Get that spear out of my face, Murgul."

"Impossible," Murgul said. "You should still be in the grave."

"Oh, yeah. That."

"You will wait here until Sabast returns," Murgul growled, poking Domri with his spear.

Nasri flicked at a bit of dirt still in Domri's hair. "I think he's one of the Golgari now."

"I'll tell you what I am, Nasri," Domri said, irritated. "Starving."

Sabast arrived with the dawn and, after he assuaged the warriors, pulled Domri into his tent. For the first time, Domri saw Sabast look completely dumbfounded.

"How did you get here? I removed the earth from the grave and you weren't there. What manner of spell did you cast? How did you escape the test?"



Domri Rade | Art by Tyler Jacobson

Domri was on the spot. He knew that Sabast was bound by Gruul tradition to believe the old legends and myths and what Domri just went through blew all that to pieces. If it was found that he didn't go through with the full test, he would lose his guild standing. But if he told Sabast the truth, he would most likely be driven out as a madman or a charlatan, or both. Either way, it didn't look good. The irritating thing was that Domri had always felt he was different than everyone in his tribe and now something truly amazing had occurred to prove it and he couldn't say anything about it without alienating himself. It made Domri mad as a maaka.

He saw the elder shaman's puzzled face as he expected an answer. Domri decided it didn't really matter what he said now. Everything had changed.

"I can't tell you what happened," Domri said, looking at his feet.

"What?"

"I can't tell you because you wouldn't believe me anyway." Domri felt the anger arise in him. "Do what you feel you have to. Banish me, whatever, it doesn't matter. Nobody has ever believed in me anyway." Domri turned to walk out.

"I'm not going to banish you," Sabast said as he grabbed Domri's arm. "Sit down. I am going to tell you something I have never told anyone in the tribe. There are no laws of the Gruul except that of the wild. I can tell something has happened to you, and that is the real power of the Burying. It is not for me to judge the chaotic forces of nature as good or bad, as the other guilds do; it is for me to guide the Gruul, to keep us in contact with those forces and to keep those forces alive within us. As long as you keep your spirit, Domri, you are Gruul, and you will have a place at the central fire."

In a rare flood of emotion, Domri embraced the old man. He felt like a weight had been lifted off him. On the long walk back to camp, Domri had not been aware of the worry that had gnawed at him about how his tribe would react—especially how Sabast would react. He left the tent, and as he walked past the staring members of his tribe, he felt a grin begin to emerge on his face. Finally, after years of just being a nobody, a kid with an affinity for the wild animals of Ravnica, Domri now felt like he knew something no other Gruul could know about. Not Sabast, not Nikya, not Borborygmos—no one. He knew of another realm, another world completely separate from this one, and it was a world that the Gruul could only dream of. Domri felt the urge to take another trip out into the wild—the real wild. Just the thought about the journey to the amazing jungle realm caused the excitement to rise up within him.

There was great adventure to be had and he was ready to crash into whatever was out there.



Boundless Realms | Art by Cliff Childs