

# The Arbiter of Law Left Chaos in His Wake

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From set *Rivals of Ixalan*

## HUATLI

Huatli swore through her teeth as she took off through the jungle toward the distant golden walls of Orazca.

She could barely make out Angrath's lumbering shape cutting a line through the thick of the rainforest ahead, and in the periphery on both sides, she saw the flash of familiar silvery scales.

"Stop right there!" Huatli growled, her eyes flashing a warm amber as she gripped the air with her fist. A half-second later, a massive dinosaur bounded into view. The dinosaur rapidly closed the distance between itself and Angrath, then effortlessly bowled him over and trapped him underfoot.

The minotaur roared in frustration, and Huatli goaded the dinosaur to roar right back.

Angrath went quiet. He was panting heavily and grunting under the dinosaur's weight.

"Do you have him under control?" asked an elderly voice from behind Huatli.

Tishana was walking forward through the thick of the rainforest, a sly grin tugging at the corners of her mouth. Behind her, Huatli saw the silhouettes of dozens of merfolk standing at the ready.

Huatli nodded. "Yes, I do. Thank you, Tishana," she replied.

Tishana shifted from one foot to the other.

Huatli calmed her racing heart. She wondered if the merfolk elder might race off again, and was half certain she should leave Angrath under her dinosaur's foot and join the merfolk if Tishana did make for the city.

"Is our agreement off, then?" Huatli asked in a steady tone.

Tishana shook her head. "I assembled my clan. Our agreement stands. Now that the city is awoken, it is a beacon. Others intend to assemble, drawn by its light—much as you are, little moth."

Huatli blinked through another wave of headache. The moth metaphor did not sit well with her.

Tishana approached, concerned. "You are unwell."

Huatli shrugged it off. "I'm fine. The closer we get to the city, the more my head hurts, is all."

"You and the pirate drift on similar currents," Tishana said cryptically. "What do you see when you glimpse beyond our veil?"

"My chain in your face!" yelled Angrath from under the dinosaur's foot. Huatli flicked her wrist and her dinosaur shoved him deeper into the dirt.

She turned back, ignoring Angrath's muffled yell in response. "I hear stories from other worlds," she said to Tishana.

Tishana laid her hand on Huatli's shoulder. Her face was serene and kind, the very soul of wisdom. "Then we should make certain you get to hear them in full, Warrior-Poet."

Huatli's heart caught in her throat. She kneeled next to Angrath, who was still trying to wriggle his way out from under her dinosaur's foot.

"Angrath, I'm sorry, but I need to go with Tishana. We had a deal first."

Angrath tried to yell at her through a face full of loam.

Huatli laid a hand on her dinosaur and gave it a brief command. "You'll be let out in thirty minutes. I'm sorry!"

Huatli whistled, and a snubhorn trotted out of the rainforest toward her. She climbed on its back with ease and took off alongside Tishana before she had to listen to any more of Angrath's furious, indistinct objections.

Tishana caught up quickly, riding the same elemental as before.

Time stretched as they approached. The spires grew closer, the sun crept higher overhead. Huatli maintained a quick pace to keep ahead of Angrath, well aware that danger lay both behind and ahead.

The gold of the city reflected the light of the sun and the heat that came with it, and after some time, Huatli blinked sweat from her eyes as she passed through the gate of the golden city.

Orazca was magnificent, a packed cityscape of shining walls and immense carvings. Huatli had wondered if it would feel like coming home, but it felt instead like visiting a distant relative. It was familiar yet alien, a place for her and yet not where she ought to be.

Tishana and Huatli pushed forward along the main thoroughfare, past an endless array of alleyways and side streets. The walls were high, but far ahead they could make out a central building, and Huatli knew in her heart of hearts that she was somehow fated to enter that building.

Out of the corner of her eye, Huatli saw Tishana point skyward.

The sky had turned as dark as river shale, and thick clouds were rising from the main spire of Orazca like smoke from a bonfire. The sight of it filled Huatli with dread. "What is happening?" she asked over the sound of her mount stomping on the pristine gold tiles of the plaza in front of the tower.

The tower ahead seemed to be staining the sky an inky black. Huatli gasped as she saw a body start to fall from the top of the tower.

"NO!" Tishana howled to her right, and Huatli felt an immense wave of magic as Tishana slapped her outstretched hands together in front of her. The body's descent slowed and then stopped altogether as a massive gust of wind rose up to break the fall, and a blanket of dust and leaves settled around the person who had fallen as they slowly came to rest on the ground. Tishana's elemental took off toward the tower, leaving Huatli on the far side of the plaza.

Huatli called out Tishana's name, but her voice was drowned out by the stampede of merfolk who all ran to surround Tishana and the body.

Huatli urged her mount to run forward. Her dinosaur's footsteps pounded a quick rhythm against the gold tile of the ground, slowing as they approached the crowd of worried merfolk. Huatli prepared for the worst. As a warrior, she was no stranger to gore, naturally, and girded herself for a grisly sight, but the body in front was largely unscathed save for a smear of blood under his chin.

Huatli dismounted and approached. Tishana was whispering to the man on the ground as several other merfolk worked a healing spell on him.

“Kumena, we’re here. Who is in the tower?”

The merfolk on the ground fluttered his eyes open. His skin was less opaque than it ought to be, and as he lifted his head, a trail of blood flowed from his mouth onto his chest. “Who do you *think* ?” he whispered.

Huatli scowled. The pulse of dark magic above her could only mean that the Legion of Dusk had taken control of the Immortal Sun, and thus, apparently, the city along with it.

Tishana gave a brief order to the merfolk at her side, then she looked back at Huatli.

“We can take them together,” she said. “We will resolve ownership of the city from there.”

Huatli smiled.

A distant noise caught her attention. In the grim overcast, she could just barely see a motley group racing toward the tower. A siren flew overhead, a familiar woman clinging to an armful of weathered canvas charged below, and in front was a scraggly and mad-looking goblin. The goblin waved a sword longer than himself in the air. He screeched with abandon as he charged. “WE WANT SUN! WE WANT SUN!”

“*Pirates*,” Tishana hissed. The merfolk grabbed Huatli by the shoulder and tugged her up the staircase inside.

“Hurry!” she yelled, and Huatli followed suit.

Her footsteps pattered a steady rhythm as she raced up the tower.



Metzali, Tower of Triumph | Art by Victor Adame Minguez

Tishana was close behind. She was clutching the jade totem that contained the elemental she had ridden in on. The staircase felt endless, and every few steps they could see a grim, imposing sky outside through a sliver-like window. Huatli’s breath was heavy with exertion, her heart furiously trying to keep pace with her feet. As they climbed higher and higher, she became more and more aware that she might not make it back home alive.

At last, the staircase ended; a massive door at the top of the tower was ajar. The entryway was four times as tall as Huatli, and for a moment she was dumbstruck, mouth agape, at the architectural majesty her ancestors had created.

“VILLAINS!” Tishana bellowed, bounding past Huatli and into the chamber ahead. Huatli watched as she threw the jade totem in first with one hand and began to awaken it with the other.

Huatli snapped back to the present. *Marvel later. Kick the vampires out now.*

She ran through the door and assessed her surroundings.

The room was large and airy. It was, like everything else in this city, plastered with an ungodly amount of fine materials, but in this case built to surround a central piece in the floor. In the center of the room was a disk embedded in the jade of the floor. The disk was about as wide as Huatli was tall, and it glowed a chilly white-blue under the feet of a menacing conquistador. A second vampire (*hierophant*, she briefly remembered) was nearby, holding a staff out in challenge.

“I am Vona, Butcher of Magan, and the Immortal Sun belongs to the Legion of Dusk!” cried the woman in the center of the room. Huatli recognized her as the sweaty vampire from the jungle.

Huatli glanced at what was beneath the vampire’s feet and gasped. There it was, inlaid in the glittering gold of the floor, as real as ever; the disk could only be the Immortal Sun.

Huatli gaped at it. “They put it in the *floor* ?!”

Tishana had already chosen her target in the room. Her elemental had grown large once more and barreled into Vona’s side as she stood on the Immortal Sun.

Huatli locked eyes with the male hierophant standing near the edge of the Immortal Sun. He lowered his staff and bared his teeth, and Huatli attacked.

She kept her center of gravity low as she cut straight across the room toward him. The vampiric priest clawed his hand in response and dove for her face, but Huatli dropped to her knees and skidded past, clipping his ankle with her blade as she slid on the cold jade of the floor.

The hierophant snarled. Huatli grabbed his cloak and yanked him to the floor, and the *crack* of his head against the ground was alarmingly loud. Huatli pinned him down with her right hand and held her blade aloft in her left.

“YOU!” called a voice from across the room. Huatli looked up in surprise, and was hit in the chest with a kick from the hierophant beneath her.

Huatli landed on her back with a hard clang from her armor. She winced, then looked up and locked eyes with Vona.

The conquistador smirked and held up a sharp-nailed hand, ready to strike. “I am the Culler of Sinners and Conqueror of Orazca!”

Dark, scentless smoke billowed through the room, and Huatli cried out as a wave of pain wracked her body. She clambered to her feet but fell down again on hands and knees, her muscles quivering and her breath caught in her throat. Huatli looked at her hand and saw that it was purple and brown with what looked like living bruises.

Terror filled her heart. Vona was using the Immortal Sun to manipulate her blood.

Huatli tried to look for Tishana, and saw the merfolk elder pulled to the ground by the hierophant.

“Tishana!” Huatli yelled, but the exclamation was cut off by her own scream as a trickle of blood ran down her lip.

Vona was laughing as she walked to the edge of the Immortal Sun closest to Huatli and knelt.

“What’s wrong?” she asked Huatli in a haunting singsong voice. “Are you *uncomfortable*?”

Suddenly, a song filled the room.

It was a man’s voice singing, melodic and soft.

Huatli froze, transfixed. She realized Vona had gone still as well, along with Tishana and the hierophant.

The song was beautiful, enchanting in a way she couldn’t place. She had to go to it. She had to be closer to its source. Huatli whipped her head around, stumbling out of Vona’s clumsy grasp even as the vampire also began seeking the source of the song.



Siren Reaver | Art by Tomasz Jedruszek

A figure was hovering just outside the window, flapping azure wings to stay aloft. All the while, he sang a tune more comforting than a lullaby and more precious than a prayer.

Vona, Tishana, and the hierophant were making their way forward, jostling to get closer to the miraculous song. Vona shoved her way to the front, her eyes wide with desire. There, just handspans away from the open window, was a feathered siren, the pirate from the *Belligerent*, and clinging to his neck was a manic-looking goblin.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, Huatli realized what was about to happen. The goblin leaped forward onto Vona’s face.

“VIOLENCE!” he yelled.

The song stopped, and the siren cheered. “Go for the eyes, Breeches!”

Huatli snapped out of her stupor and tried to make a run for the Immortal Sun while Vona was screaming.

The goblin was clawing and scratching at the vampire woman’s face, laughing all the while.



Just then, the floor shuddered and Huatli heard a loud banging noise. Everyone in the room whipped their heads around to find the source of the clamor.

The golden doors to the room were lying flat on the ground, and standing above them, howling in rage, was Angrath.



Angrath, Minotaur Pirate | Art by Chris Rahn

Huatli recognized the smell of burnt meat just as the minotaur casually tossed her the charred head of the dinosaur she had assigned to stand on top of him. The head hit the ground with a meaty slap.

“You are *AWFUL*!” Huatli screamed at Angrath.

“YOU MADE YOUR DINOSAUR STAND ON TOP OF ME!” he howled back before setting his sights on the conquistador with the goblin on her face.

Angrath aimed his white-hot chains at Vona. The chains wrapped around Breeches, who screeched and swore as he was yanked backward. He immediately regained his footing and charged Angrath.

As Angrath and the goblin scuffled, Huatli looked for Tishana, who had just succeeded in binding the hierophant with some vines growing from a crack in the ceiling.

Tishana looked at Huatli, then looked at the Immortal Sun on the ground and the vampire being dragged off it. Huatli looked at Angrath, who briefly glanced at Tishana and back to the Sun.

They all paused, then moved at the same time in a mad scramble.

All at once, Tishana dove forward and slapped her hand on the Sun, Huatli kicked her foot out to touch its side, Angrath stomped into the center, and Vona slammed both hands down on top of it once more.

The four of them gasped as an immense current of energy passed through them.

Huatli laughed aloud at how wonderful it felt.



Huatli, Radiant Champion | Art by Chris Rahn

Her perception spread across the city, her soul spread thin and broad over the magic inlaid in the city of her ancestors. She suddenly knew every path, felt every current of energy, and sensed the boundaries of every building and the reach of every spire. But most wonderful of all, she perceived five immense heartbeats, one at each corner of the city.

*The Elder Dinosaurs have awoken*, Huatli thought, and a tear ran down her cheek. The tale of the Elder Dinosaurs had taken the longest to memorize, an agonizing two years to lock in her mind in its entirety. They were ancient and wild, utterly untamable, the greatest of the dinosaurs. She called Elder Dinosaurs to her, and felt the ground tremble as they began to approach. Huatli's joy overcame her and she continued to laugh . . .

But there, just beyond the city's edge, she felt the footsteps of Emperor Apatzec's army. An army she had not asked for. Huatli's smile fell. She felt stupid. She should have known he wouldn't *just* send her. She remembered where her body was, and brought her attention back to the room at the top of the tower.

The Immortal Sun was glowing fiercely below the four of them. Angrath had one foot on the Immortal Sun and one foot on the normal floor, and the magnified heat of his body had caused his other foot to sink through the gold. Tishana's feet were cemented to the Immortal Sun through a series of interwoven vines. Vona was scrambling, calling more dark smoke toward herself. Each of them readied a weapon, and their eyes darted from person to person.

Huatli gripped her blade and slowly stood tall. Her mind was buzzing with the energy of the city and the distant tug of the Elder Dinosaurs. She quietly assessed the threat posed by each foe.

Vona was exhausted and could easily be disposed of. Tishana briefly glanced at her, but Huatli couldn't read her intent. Angrath was seething, as always. The siren and the goblin Breeches stood on the outside, clearly wanting the others to battle it out so they could swoop in like the pirates they were. The hierophant remained secured to the wall with vines.



Huatli crouched to attack. She locked eyes with Tishana across from her and nodded her head slightly toward Vona. Tishana almost imperceptibly returned the nod, and Huatli prepared to pounce.

Suddenly, the siren and goblin both gasped. They looked at each other with wide, confused eyes.

“Malcolm, you heard Jace too?!” Breeches said, looking up at his shipmate.

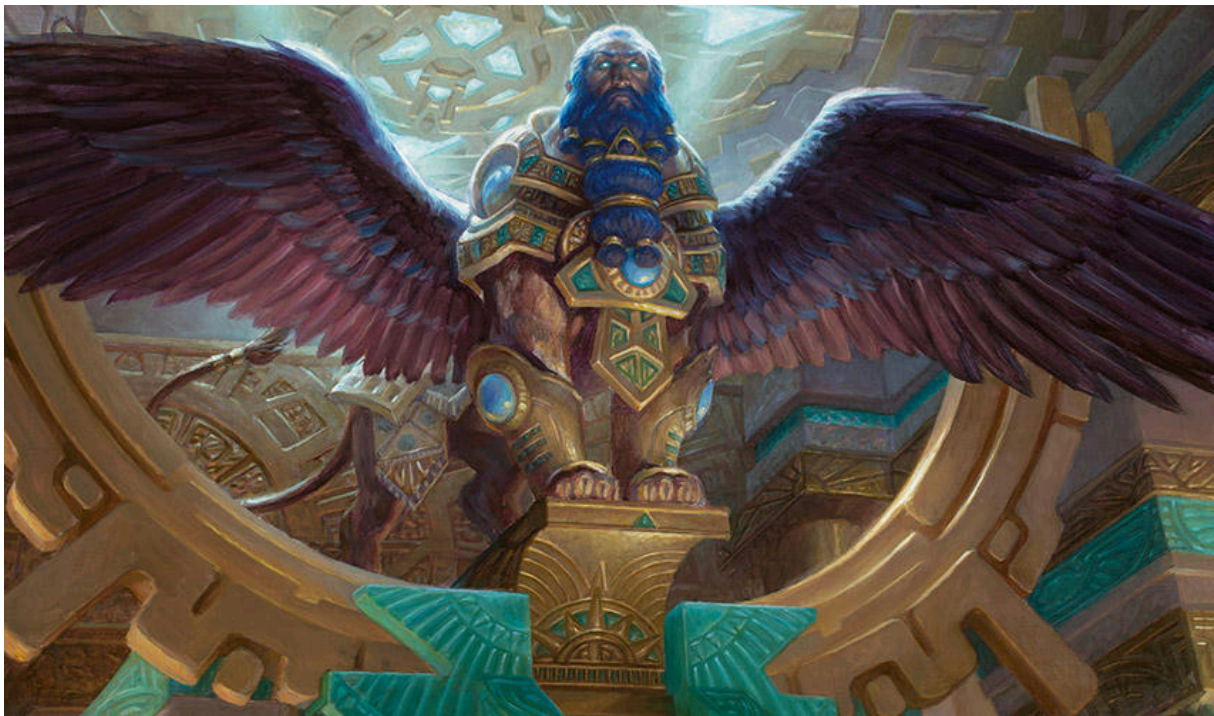
*Jace?* Huatli thought, alarmed. *The telepath?*

The siren nodded, afraid.

There was a pregnant pause.

And then the floor gave out beneath them.

## VRASKA



Azor, the Lawbringer | Art by Ryan Pancoast

“If this *gorgon* is not my prisoner, then who have you brought for me to seal?” asked Azor from atop his lofty, self-made throne.

Before knowing Jace, Vraska had thought of sphinxes as little more than riddle-obsessed head cases who wouldn’t deign to speak to something as unclean as a gorgon. Now, though, as she kept her fear at bay by trying to locate the source of the pervasive smell of cats in the room (a shabby-looking nest of fabric and straw in the corner, which left no doubt that Azor had been in this room for a very long time), Vraska found herself thinking that the only good sphinx was a sphinx frozen in stone at the entrance to a library.

*We need answers more than we need him dead*, Jace said to Vraska in her mind.

Vraska bristled as she felt the sphinx try to pry his way around Jace’s ward, which nevertheless remained firmly in place. Azor lazily turned his gaze to Jace.



“And here stands the Living Guildpact.” Azor preened. “I congratulate you on not utterly destroying the system of guilds.”

“Thank you,” Jace said tersely.

“You’re welcome.”

Azor spread his wings and settled on all fours. His tail was swinging lazily behind him. Vraska refused to let her guard down.

“If you are not here with a prisoner, then I assume you are here for this,” Azor said. “The lock of my prison, my finest creation.”

Azor glanced up to the ceiling. Vraska’s eyes followed, and the realization clicked.



The Immortal Sun | Art by Kieran Yanner

It was what kept them there. Not a separate enchantment, not the plane itself.

Vraska’s gut dropped. *Why did my employer want me to steal something that locks away planeswalkers?*

“If you are here for the Immortal Sun, I’m afraid you are not allowed to have it.” Azor’s demeanor shifted, and suddenly a chill ran down Vraska’s spine. The sphinx spoke with magic resonating through every syllable. *“Trespassing is not allowed within the walls of Orazca.”*

The surge of hieromancy circumvented Jace’s ward and hit Vraska all at once. A binding of glowing white runic magic grabbed hold of her torso and shoved her back toward the door behind them.

Jace called out Vraska’s name in surprise, and almost immediately Vraska felt Jace’s magic countering the grip of Azor’s hieromancy. Vraska fell to the floor, safe behind an even stronger ward. Free from the sphinx’s spell, she shot to her feet, turning toward Azor and snarling.

“Your law magic can’t prevent me from turning you to stone, you know!” she yelled, her tendrils flicking wildly in her fury. “Tell us who you are, or I’ll kill you where you stand!”

“I will tell you nothing, gorgon.”

Jace’s eyes immediately flashed cold blue, and he held out his hand. Azor roared and pawed at his head.

“You will refer to her as *Captain* !” Jace asserted.

Azor flapped his wings, and the dust of the room kicked up around them. He held his chest out in irritation, and spoke with the practiced meter of an orator.

“For thousands of years I planeswalked through countless worlds, Captain Vraska. They were strange and unruly, full of brutal societies plagued with violence and disorder. I used hieromancy to give these people the gift of stability; I created systems of governance to cure them of their chaos. I selflessly toiled to improve the Multiverse, and my gifts turned worlds from places of madness and brutality into structured bastions of peace! I founded countless systems of governance to shape the communal destiny of countless planes, and your rejection of my decree is most unwise. **The law is meant to be followed** . “

Vraska felt Azor’s magic bounce off of and around Jace’s ward. He stood defiantly and glowered at the sphinx.

“We know you built the structure of guilds on Ravnica. I’m guessing you weren’t from there. Why didn’t you stay?” Vraska asked.

*“The law is meant to be followed!”*

Jace grimaced. An even stronger wave of Azor’s law magic assaulted Jace’s defenses with the fierceness of a battering ram.

“Why didn’t you stay?!” Vraska demanded again.

Azor roared, giving up on trying to get through Jace’s ward. The room went quiet and still.

The sphinx crossed his paws in annoyance. “Because Ravnica was one of many, and I left when I was finished.” He flicked his wings, trying another tactic. “You are talented, Living Guildpact. Have you upheld your responsibilities well at home?”

*A diversion* , Vraska thought, opening her mouth to get this confrontation back on track.

“No,” Jace said with brutal honesty, “. . . I have not.”

Vraska’s train of thought vanished. Jace was safe behind his psychic barriers, and yet still entirely vulnerable. His voice betrayed his unease with himself. “Azor, you built an incredibly intricate system with magic more complex than any one person could readily understand, and yet you made your fail-safe a *living mortal* . Even if I had a gift for governance, I would not be able to accomplish the task I have been burdened with.”

Jace’s shoulders fell. Vraska didn’t know what to say to his admission. Azor merely puffed his chest.

“The guilds are a perfect system.”

“The guilds *were* a perfect system,” Vraska corrected, punctuating each syllable with as much venom as she could and directing it at Azor. “But the guilds have turned malicious and cruel in your absence.”

“And whose fault is that?” Azor asked. “I gave Ravnica its guilds just as I gave countless other worlds other perfect systems of law and governance.”

This sphinx may have lived a thousand lifetimes longer than her, but he was a fool, a cruel patriarch. Azor was entirely unaware of the consequences of his interference. Vraska’s fists were balled at her sides. “I don’t think you have the authority to speak of flaws when you manipulated planes that *were not yours* only to abandon them when you wanted to move on to the next!”

Azor sat up, chin high, claws ever so slightly extended. “If my governments—my *gifts* —soured, the fault lies with the citizens.”

“Then what about that?” Vraska added, her finger pointed at the Immortal Sun lodged in the ceiling. “Was Ixalan one of your efforts as well?”

Azor’s claws were fully extended.

“What does it *do*?” Vraska pressed further, ignoring the blossoming realization that she was not quite ready for a physical confrontation with a giant sphinx.

Azor began to step down from his throne. Both Vraska and Jace tensed at his approach.

“As caretaker and arbiter of law for the entirety of the Multiverse, it was my duty to collaborate for the greater good. The Immortal Sun was built to imprison one specific enemy. It amplifies the magical abilities of whoever touches it, and it prevents planeswalkers from leaving a plane. The perfect cage for a diabolical Planeswalker! I gave up my spark to help create the Immortal Sun, the lock of my prison, my greatest gift to all living things.”

“What evil were you trying to imprison?” Vraska asked.

“A fiend who was a danger to all the Multiverse. Our plan, naturally, was perfect. But my friend failed.”

“*Our* plan? So you made it with someone else?”

Azor growled. “He *was* my friend. He was *supposed* to help me get back my spark after our plan worked, which it did *not* —”

“So your *friend* helped make the Immortal Sun and then abandoned you?” Vraska clarified, desperate for more information from the slightly batty and clearly bitter sphinx.

“He was to lure our foe to a faraway plane and I was to use the Immortal Sun to enhance my hieromancy and summon that foe here, to Ixalan. But I never received the signal to activate the Immortal Sun. I do not know my associate’s fate,” Azor said with a flick of his tail. “We devised the plan over a thousand years ago, and I came to Ixalan a little over a hundred years after that. *He* failed. I do not know what happened, but *my* execution was perfect—”

Vraska resisted the urge to hurl herself out the nearest window. *He’s been cooped up on this plane for a thousand years.*

Azor continued rambling. “I did not want anything to do with the Immortal Sun. It was a reminder of my friend’s failure, so I decided to give the gift of governance to this plane. Ixalan was to be ruled by whoever possessed the Immortal Sun, and I initially gifted it to a monastery in the east, in Torrezon. But they were not worthy, so I took it back, and gifted it to others. The Sun Empire was not worthy. The River Heralds, as evidenced by the awakening of Orazca, were not worthy. Only I am worthy, and so I must work further to perfect this system.”

Vraska gestured broadly. “By blaming others for problems you caused?!”

“I have been planning! If I am not able to continue to perfect the Multiverse, then I can still do it here—I can fix Ixalan!”

Vraska glared at him. “How can you be so blind to the damage you have caused?!”

The outburst upset the sphinx. Azor tucked his ears back and frowned.

“It is not the system that is faulty, it is the people,” he replied coldly.

“The last few centuries on this plane have been chaos because of *your* intervention,” Vraska spat.

“I *fixed* this plane—”

“This plane was never broken!” Vraska yelled.

Azor roared, spread his wings, and launched himself toward her.

Jace brought up a shroud of invisibility around himself and Vraska. As they both spun away to dodge the sphinx's charge, Vraska unsheathed her sword and cut a long thin line across Azor's back leg.

The sphinx roared with pain and landed, sweeping wildly around him with his wings. "*Reveal yourself!*" he commanded, and Vraska felt Jace lift their camouflage.

Jace's eyes glowed with power, and Vraska could feel him reach past his own psychic ward and manipulate Azor's mind, sending the feeling of a piercing migraine through the sphinx's head.

Azor gasped.

Jace caught his breath and looked to Vraska. *Are you hurt?*

*No*, she replied, *but I'd love to petrify him before he tries that again.*

*He does not deserve death*, Jace asserted.

Vraska looked at him gravely. *He deserves punishment.*

She stepped forward alongside Jace and stared down the sphinx. "Your life was spent fixing what *you* saw as problems on other planes, and you meddled with business that *was not yours*."

"I am the Arbiter of Law—" Azor interrupted.

Jace gripped his fist and Azor groaned in pain.

"Let her talk!" Jace growled.

The sphinx struggled to lift his head, but was too disoriented by Jace's spell.

"The Immortal Sun has spawned hundreds of years of conflict on this plane," Vraska growled, eager to continue. "It led the Legion of Dusk to conquer an entire continent. It caused the Sun Empire and the River Heralds to mercilessly wage war upon one another. *Your* artifact unbalanced an entire plane, and yet you refuse to be held accountable."

Vraska knelt next to Azor. "The wars of this plane are on your head, and the prison where I suffered needlessly on Ravnica, where *my people were subjugated*, was ultimately of your making."

She leaned closer and hissed, eyes glinting gold, "You deserve punishment. A leader cannot abandon their responsibilities."

". . . Captain," Jace interjected from behind. His voice was gentle and calm.

Vraska looked to him.

Jace's face was unreadable, eyes distant, his mouth a firm line.

"I think I need to do this," he said calmly.

Vraska blinked, uncertain of what he meant. "Do you want to punish him?"

He stared back. Vraska watched a specter of uncertainty, then resolution, pass across his face. He nodded. "It is my responsibility to act on behalf of Ravnica."

Vraska understood.

"Very well," she said, stepping away to watch.

Jace approached, and the roles shifted, as if players on a stage had passed around their scripts. Where once stood a conqueror there was now a convict. An assistant, now a judge. The Living Guildpact



stared at the parun of the Azorius and spoke with the wisdom and earnestness of the Jace Vraska knew well.

“The Living Guildpact maintains balance between the guilds of Ravnica. You, Azor, parun of the Azorius, are an inherent part of Ravnica, and have caused imbalance not just on my home, but on countless other planes.”

Vraska stood still and listened. Azor was quivering, cowering like a kitten. He could have fought, could have tackled Jace on the spot, but there was deeper magic at work, a powerful level of hieromancy Vraska could not see or understand that kept the sphinx in check. The evocation of status had halted Azor in his tracks, and he listened with wide round eyes to his sentencing. Jace, meanwhile, did not try to tower over Azor. He did not try to physically dominate or intimidate. His posture was calm and measured, his eye contact constant. This was an act of humility, of accepting something he never asked for.

Jace continued, “Not only did you decide it was your place to govern what was not yours, you also never stopped to consider the consequences of your actions. Ixalan is in peril, Ravnica was *built* to be unstable after you departed, and countless other worlds have likely suffered from your deliberate intervention. Whatever your intentions were, you did not seek to understand the full ramifications of your choices.”

Azor sputtered through his pain, “Our intention was to imprison Nicol Bolas—”

Vraska’s jaw fell open.

She glanced at Jace, who seemed to be frozen still. His eyes were wide with realization, fingers still in the air before him.

Vraska recognized Jace’s expression as the same one from the riverbank. She could see the whites of his eyes and the quiver of his lip.

A brief image flashed in her mind.



Omniscience | Art by Josh Hass

She shivered. *He just remembered Nicol Bolas. He knows him after all.*

“Azor . . . may I see how you know who he is?” Jace asked. From anyone else, the question would have been odd, or misspoken. But this was a telepath’s phrasing. Vraska’s heart beat furiously in her chest.

The sphinx’s lip quivered as he considered Jace’s request. “Yes.”

Jace closed his eyes and Vraska watched as he gently, delicately poured his senses into Azor’s mind. She realized he remembered Alhammarret’s teachings, and wondered how it felt to peel open the mind of a sphinx.

Jace glanced at Vraska. His eyes were alight with power, but his brows creased in confusion and terror. She knew that whatever he was seeing was bad news.

“Thank you, Azor,” he said. He stood, taking a moment to compose himself and think through whatever evidence he had just seen. After a few seconds, he let out a shuddering sigh.

Jace continued, a crease on his brow and a grimace in his expression. “Your intentions were noble, but the effect of the Immortal Sun on Ixalan has been catastrophic. You and the Immortal Sun are a danger to the stability of this plane.”

A strange haze of blue magic shifted across the sphinx’s head, vanishing as quickly as it had appeared.

Jace stepped away, the magic in his eyes gone, and spoke with the authority of the Guildpact. Vraska felt a chill run down her neck as he spoke, and realized for the first time just how much power that position carried.

“You will be the master and caretaker of Useless Island. You will not be able to leave, and you will never meddle in the lives of sentient beings ever again. Leave the Immortal Sun here and depart with your life. As Living Guildpact, that is my decree.”

The invocation of Ravnican magic around the parun of the Azorius lifted Jace’s words, and Vraska felt a strange foreign rush of law magic ringing in his voice.

Azor blinked. Vraska snuffed out the petrification spell she had kept charged throughout their meeting.

Azor spread his wings, which spanned the width of the throne room. He beat them, rose into the air, and flew out the door Vraska and Jace had entered through without another word.

His silhouette vanished above the canopy in the distance, and he was gone.

Vraska looked up at the Immortal Sun, uncertain how she felt about it now.

“Why does Nicol Bolas want an artifact that imprisons Planeswalkers?” she asked in hushed fear.

Jace’s lips were a stern line, and he looked at her with dread.

“Vraska,” he said, his voice wavering, “you need to know who you’re working for.”