
For Zendikar

Kimberly J. Kreines

From set *Prologue to Battle for Zendikar*

12. 08. 2015

It has been many years since the world of Zendikar first reached out to Nissa Revane, sending her visions, entreating her to help remove the dark monster that was trapped inside its mountains. Though Nissa bravely faced the Eldrazi monstrosity then, she was not able to destroy it . . . nor its brothers. Since that first encounter, Nissa has devoted her life to fighting the swarms of Eldrazi that plague her world. She has met with many missteps and failures, but it seems that Zendikar still has faith in her; the world sends its power to her when she calls, and it manifests as a giant, tree-like elemental to aid her in battle. So Nissa continues to fight, all the while hoping that Zendikar was right to choose her.



Nissa, Sage Animist | Art by Wesley Burt

Nissa stood alongside Zendikar's towering elemental on a ridge overlooking the Vastwood Forest. From their height it was almost possible—if she relaxed her focus and squinted just a bit—to perceive only the greens and browns, the natural colors of the forest.



Animist's Awakening | Art by Chris Rahn

But she knew the chalky parts were there; they ran in rivulets through the land like dried out riverbeds. Nissa wished that's all they were. A drought, even the worst drought, would be far preferable to what the world was facing now.

The crumpled, white trails of corruption that the Eldrazi of Ulamog's brood left in their wake were death. They were emptiness. They were nothing. The Eldrazi drained the life and essence from all the living things they encountered. Not a single blade of grass grew where they had traveled; even the persistent lion flies gave the corrupted areas a wide berth. At first, many of the Zendikari believed that the dead land would recover—that given time, life would return. But as the years passed, the swaths of Eldrazi corruption only spread. It seemed the damage that the Eldrazi caused was permanent. The life Zendikar lost was lost for good.

It was getting to the point where the world didn't have that much more to give.

"They want to take it all," Nissa said. "Sometimes I don't know if we can stop them."

She was talking mostly to herself, but also to the elemental at her side. She had taken to talking to it over the course of the last few days even though, from what she could tell, it did not understand what she was saying.

The only sign of communication Nissa got from the elemental was a gesture that it repeated a few times each day, reaching out with one branch-like hand to grasp something Nissa couldn't see or understand.

She had tried to interpret its meaning, but each time she guessed she seemed to be wrong. That didn't deter Nissa from talking to it though. Since they had left the company of Hamadi and the other elves, it had only been the two of them making their way across what remained of the Vastwood Forest, and Nissa found it comforting to use her voice for something other than battle cries.

"That was some good work back there." Nissa nodded over her shoulder indicating the section of the forest they had just cleared. Two Eldrazi corpses lay behind them, and the elemental at Nissa's side was responsible for ripping four of the tentacles off the largest one.



Ulamog's Crusher | Art by Todd Lockwood

Nissa wanted to show her gratitude, but she was still learning how this was supposed to work. The first time she had summoned the towering elemental, she was just as shocked as those around her. The power of it, the might, the sheer size, it was overwhelming. Sure, she was used to battling alongside elementals, used to channeling the power of the land through them, but she was not used to this.

This elemental wasn't like the others. And not just because it was large enough to lift an entire mid-sized Eldrazi with just one of its branch-like hands—though that was definitely a positive quality. This elemental did not return to the land after the battle.

It stuck around, it followed Nissa, it watched her. And though it might not understand, it seemed to listen to her.

It had a presence, a personality. Perhaps even more.

Which is why it felt strange that it did not have a name.

“I would like to know what to call you,” Nissa said, looking up through the elemental’s branches to the lightening sky of a new dawn. “For times like this, when we talk, I would like to call you something. Do you have a name?”

The elemental made no move to respond, not that Nissa was expecting it to. Still . . . “If I gave you a name would that be okay?”

The elemental did not seem to resist the notion.

“Then how about Ashaya?” Nissa said. “Ashaya, the Awoken World.” She had gotten the idea for the name from Hamadi. The first time Nissa had summoned the elemental, Hamadi had called Nissa “Shaya,” which he said meant “Worldwaker.” If she was the Worldwaker, then it only made sense that the elemental was the awoken world.



Gaea’s Revenge | Art by Kekai Kotaki

The elemental’s branches twisted and stretched. Nissa thought it looked as though it was trying on the name, testing it out. When its roots settled it seemed content.

“Okay then, Ashaya it is,” Nissa said. The name felt right, it felt good. As the first rays of the sun’s light stretched up over the horizon, she sighed. “So, Ashaya, what do we do now?”

It was a question that Nissa had been asking herself a lot lately.

What was one elf supposed to do with all this power?

One elf on this vast world . . . in an even greater Multiverse.

What was one elf supposed to do?

But then wasn’t that exactly what Hamadi had been trying to tell her? She was supposed to save the world. She was supposed to use the power, use the elemental, Ashaya, and destroy the Eldrazi. Zendikar had chosen her.

But Hamadi didn't know the whole story. Zendikar had chosen Nissa once before. Back when she was very young, it had sent her visions and called for her help.

And Nissa had tried to help it.

But she had failed.



Nissa's Revelation | Art by Izzy

She had *failed*.

So why had the world chosen her again?

"Truly, I'm asking you." Nissa looked to the place on Ashaya's wooden front plate where the elemental's eyes might have been, if it had eyes. "What does Zendikar expect me to do? What do you expect me to do?"

The elemental gave no sign of having heard her.

"You *are* part of Zendikar, aren't you?" Nissa wanted to shake its branches, shake an answer out of its impassive wooden features. "Why are you here—with me? Of all the elves . . . all the people, the kor, the merfolk on Zendikar—you could have even picked a goblin. But me?" Nissa shook her head. "I failed. Last time you chose me, I failed. What makes you think this time will be any different? What makes you think that I'll somehow be better, stronger, more brave? This is all that I am. Right here." Nissa stretched her arms, exposing her full stature to the elemental. "This is it. And this is all I'll ever be."

Ashaya, the Awoken World, shifted; it lifted one massive hand, holding it open with its palm facing Nissa.

It was performing the same gesture, as it had countless times before. Nissa sighed "What? What does that mean?"

The elemental slowly formed a fist with its thick, branch-like fingers.

Nissa glowered. "I don't understand. I don't know what you're trying to tell me."

Ashaya pulled the fist in toward its chest, extended it again, and then, one by one, it unfurled its fingers, opening its hand palm-up.

Nissa knew that's where the gesture would end. She had seen it all before.

She had tried placing her hand in the elemental's hand. She had tried stretching out her own arm, palm up. She had guessed that it meant she was supposed to look up, to open herself, to reach out for Zendikar. And she had done all of these things. To no avail.

Ashaya made the gesture again.

"You're as stubborn as I am," Nissa said.

Ashaya tried a third time. And then a fourth.

"Enough." Nissa stopped the elemental halfway through, taking hold of its large thumb in both of her hands. With the touch, the tension went out of her own shoulders. She breathed in the smell Ashaya carried, the scent of the forest—dirt, sap, wood, and leaves. It was wonderful. It was powerful. "I'm sorry. I wish I could understand you." Her heart ached with the honesty of her longing.

Ashaya moved its other hand on top of Nissa's, clasping Nissa's small elvish hand between its two expansive branch-like ones. This was something new, something the elemental had never done before.

Nissa's heart quickened and her fingers tingled, anticipating whatever was to come.

The air between them became thick, and Nissa felt a powerful force radiating from Ashaya—and then from the valley below came a distant but desperate scream.

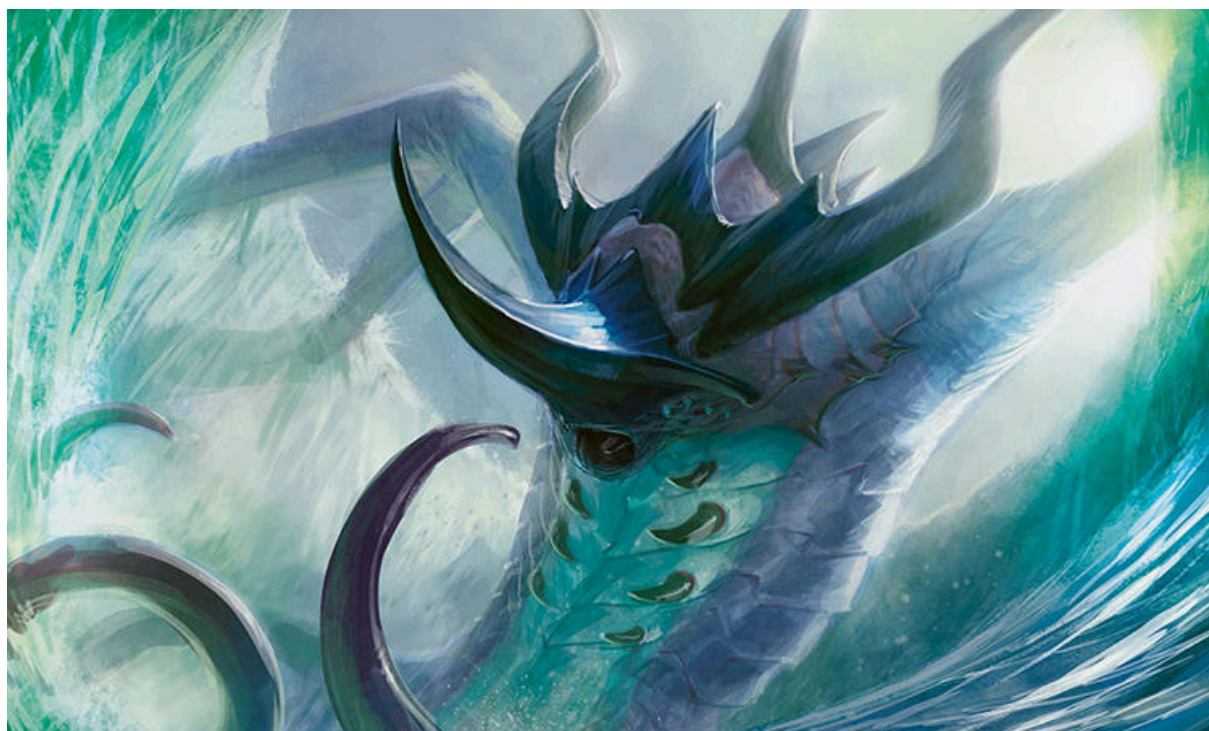
Both Nissa and Ashaya started. Together they turned in the direction of the cry, looking over the edge of the ridge.

A second cry pierced the dawning day, this one strangled.

"There!" Nissa pointed. Not too far off, the taut, unnaturally purple flesh of an Eldrazi shone in the early morning light.

From what Nissa could see, it looked as though the Eldrazi had just invaded a small encampment. There were at least two fires smoldering nearby, and what looked like a dozen or so tents interspersed between the trees.

Three figures had the Eldrazi surrounded; one looked like it was a kor, the other two might have been elves. The Eldrazi seemed to have trapped a fourth figure—maybe a human—under one of its bony elbows. The human cried out again.



Regress | Art by Izzy

As Nissa and Ashaya watched, the trees near the small encampment trembled. Then with three quick, echoing snaps, three trees crashed to the ground as two more Eldrazi monstrosities—one tentacled and one with too many hands—pushed their way into the encampment. Their wake of chalky corruption consumed the fallen trunks.

Three more trees gone from Zendikar forever.

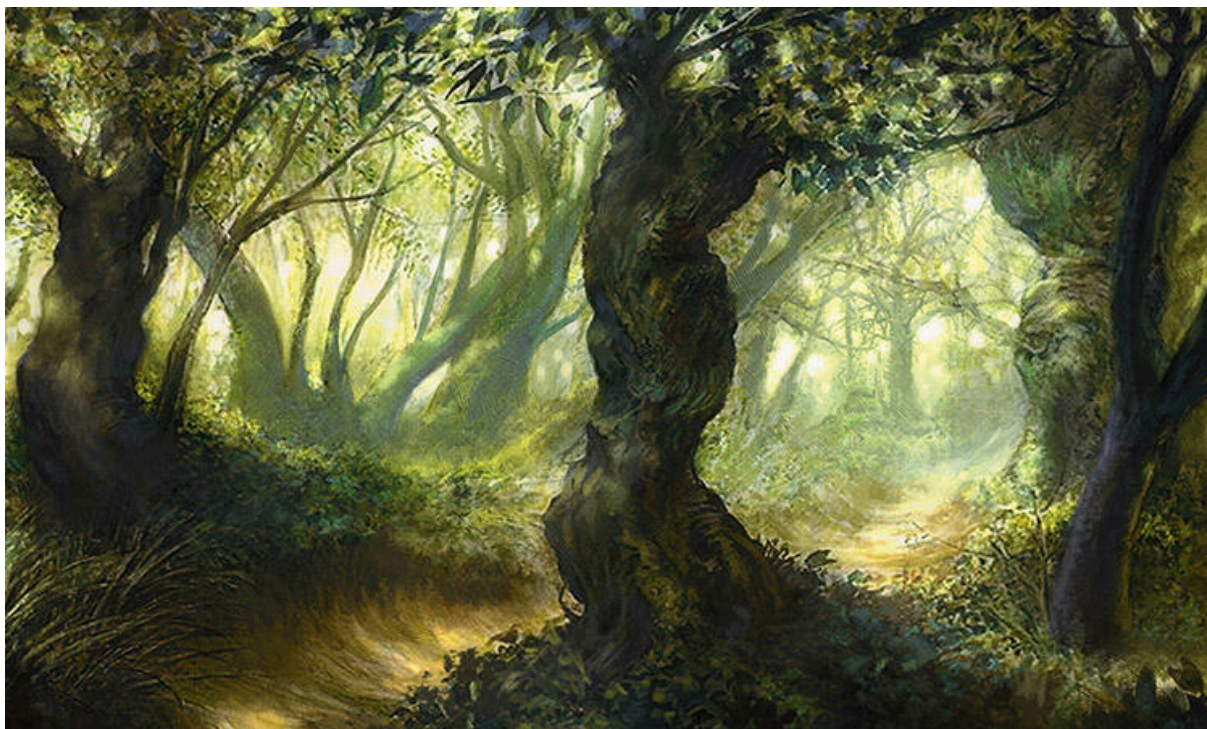
The tentacled Eldrazi reached for the kor who was busy fighting back the original, purple monstrosity. “Behind you!” Nissa called, but the wind carried her voice away from the valley.

The thickest of the Eldrazi’s tentacles slashed at the back of the kor’s knees, sending her to the ground and out of Nissa’s line of sight. “No!”

Ashaya released Nissa’s hand and Nissa raced down the back of the ridge. “This way.” She tugged on the elemental, directing it to follow.

The brush was thick and there was no clear path to take. Though Nissa was proficient at moving through thick forest, her concern for the kor drove her forward faster than she should have gone. She stumbled twice on her way down, berating herself each time for losing precious seconds.

Once on level ground, Nissa oriented herself by the sun and pressed through the trees, urging Ashaya along with her. Branches slapped her face and brambles bit at her ankles, but she let each scratch remind her of the forest’s strength, the strength she would wield against the Eldrazi.



Forest | Art by Jonas De Roe

By the time she and Ashaya reached the small encampment, the tents, supplies, and fallen bodies were splattered with blood and sticky with Eldrazi gore—or had been turned to hollow, chalky husks. In the center of it all the Eldrazi with taut, purple flesh was feeding on the corpse of an elf.

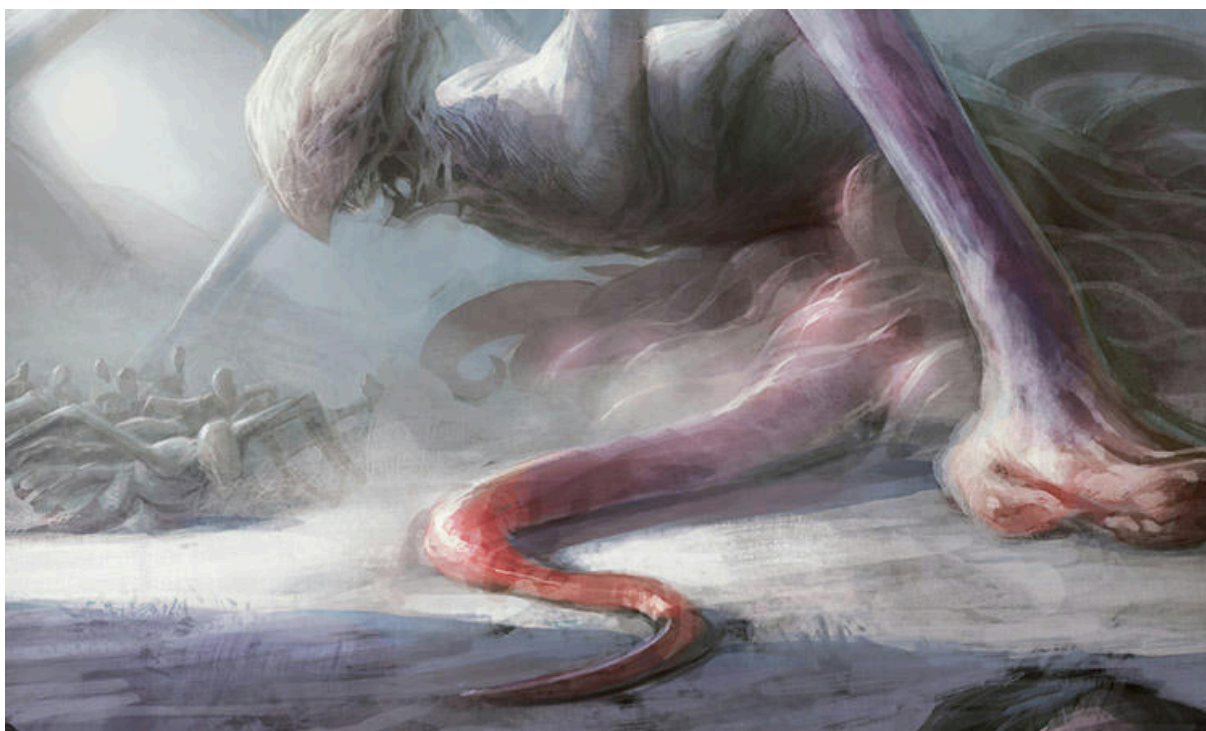
Nissa looked away for just long enough to swallow the bile that rose in the back of her throat, then she turned back and charged, willing Ashaya along with her.

She reached for the land under the purple Eldrazi, pulling a large swath of the ground—along with the plants, fallen branches, and other forest detritus upon it—up and away with a great yank. As the land tilted beneath it, the Eldrazi slid to the side, skidding down the small incline that Nissa had made . . . and straight into Ashaya’s waiting arms.

Nissa pushed her power into the elemental as it squeezed the Eldrazi’s neck, crushing whatever internal structure held the monstrosity up, until it hung limp and lifeless. At Nissa’s command, Ashaya released the incapacitated Eldrazi. With a dull thud, the horror fell to the forest floor, coming to rest alongside the body of the elf.

With one Eldrazi down, Nissa pivoted, alert for the other two . . . but too late.

A thick, red tentacle closed around Ashaya’s leg. The tentacled Eldrazi, now with only three tentacles—the Zendikari at the camp must have managed to sever three others—pulled itself toward the elemental.



Spawnsire of Ulamog | Art by Izzy

Rage churned in Nissa's chest. "Get away from Ashaya."

She summoned the strong, twisting roots of a nearby tree, directing them to wind around one of the Eldrazi's back tentacles. It was a tug-of-war: Nissa willed Ashaya to trudge in one direction as the roots of the tree pulled with the force of the land in the other. The Eldrazi would soon be broken, split straight through its blubbery, red flesh.

"Help!" A voice cleaved Nissa's concentration.

It had come from above. A kor—the one Nissa had seen from the ridge—was high in the branches of a tall tree. The third Eldrazi was grasping for her with eight bifurcated appendages that ended in sixteen eight-fingered hands.

The kor slashed at the nearest appendage with her hook, taking off three of the fingers at their fourth joint, but she winced in pain as she did so and collapsed on the nearest branch. She had been injured, most likely in the struggle Nissa had witnessed before. She needed help.



Kor Hookmaster | Art by Wayne Reynolds

Nissa reached out to the branches of the tree, commanding a dozen of them at a time, directing them to spool around the kor. But the barrier deterred the Eldrazi for only a moment. Each of the horror's sixteen appendages grabbed hold of one of the branches and yanked. Even the thickest of the branches snapped like a twig.

Nissa looked to Ashaya for aid, but her lack of attention on the elemental meant that the tentacled Eldrazi had had the chance to gain ground. It had overcome the tug-of-war and secured its grip around Ashaya's leg with another of its tentacles. It was pulling the elemental toward its chittering mouth.

"Help!" The kor called again. "Please!"

Nissa's heart raced. She looked from Ashaya to the kor. She couldn't be in two places at once. The fact was simple: she needed Ashaya's strength to rescue the kor. "Just hold on!"

She thrust all of her power into Ashaya, willing the elemental to pivot on its trapped leg and stomp down on the Eldrazi's tentacles with its other massive foot—once, twice, and again.



Stirring Wildwood | Art by Eric Deschamps

The impacts sent Eldrazi gore flying, and the result was that the Eldrazi had only one tentacle left. The injury seemed to be enough to throw it off balance. It slithered backward, retreating into the tree line, writhing and gnashing.

Nissa didn't pause, she pulled Ashaya along with her—severed tentacles and all—to face the third, too-many-handed Eldrazi.

But it was gone.

So was the kor.

Nissa desperately searched the trees, pushing branches out of her line of sight. Where had the horror gone? Where had it taken the kor?

The sound of rustling gave it away. Nissa parted the trembling trees, exposing the Eldrazi's path. It was already several hundred yards away, skittering agilely along on fourteen appendages; it had flipped itself over to make seven of its arms into legs, and its eighth appendage was bent at an unnatural angle to hold the kor up to its feeding cavity.

White, chalky corruption was winding its way up the kor's leg.

"No!" Nissa sprinted through the trough the Eldrazi had carved between the trees, but there was no stopping it; the Eldrazi consumed the kor's life, turning her still, pale body into dust.

The dust clouded Nissa's vision and stung her eyes; she slowed, blinking back tears. There was no more she could do for the kor.

With a long exhalation, as much to clear her lungs of the memory as her mind, she picked her way back to the encampment, back to Ashaya.

She crossed a trail of corruption on her way, most likely left behind by the maimed Eldrazi with one tentacle. Nissa's heart dropped. If that Eldrazi had left the camp that meant there was nothing left for it to feed on, nothing left at all.

Soon she saw that she was right; the small clearing had been lost to Eldrazi corruption. Nissa counted five corpses, but there was no knowing how many more had already disintegrated.



Contaminated Ground | Art by Christine Choi

Ashaya stood in the center of the clearing, the only color—green and brown—against the unnatural expanse of white. The elemental appeared to be in mourning. They had lost this battle. Many had lost their lives. And the land had lost much, too. For that, Nissa was gravely sorry. But she had warned Ashaya. She had told it that she was not the right choice for Zendikar. Now it must finally see she was right.

“It’s not your fault.” The thin, dry voice startled Nissa. For the space of a heartbeat she thought it belonged to the elemental, but then she found the source: a vampire limping toward her from a section of thick trees. He was carrying the body of an unconscious human. “You did all you could.” A few paces away from Nissa, he knelt and gently laid the human on the chalky ground.

The sight of a vampire caring so tenderly for another living being was bewildering. Nissa knitted her brow, looking from the vampire to the woman.

“Don’t worry, she’s not in pain,” the vampire murmured. “I have made sure of that. She will pass shortly and then she can be buried,” he surveyed the other chalky corpses, “with the rest.” He stood, taking a step toward Nissa.



Malakir Cullblade | Art by Igor Kieryluk

Instinctively, she took a step back.

The vampire laughed, a low, sober laugh. “That is fair considering your history with vampires, Nissa.”

Nissa drew a sharp breath. “How do you know my name? What are you—where . . . ?” She stumbled over her words, her mind reeling.

“So many questions. And I will answer them all,” the vampire purred. “But first, I have a question for you. If you don’t mind. Why are you still here? Why are you still on Zendikar?”

Nissa blinked, her confusion mounting.

“I would have thought you would have left long ago,” the vampire said, “along with the others like you. When I took it upon myself to execute this mission, I assumed I would have to find one on the verge of sparking, one whom I could beseech before he or she had the power to walk away from this dying world. But finding a Planeswalker before the first planeswalk is even more impossible a task than it might sound.”

“You know?” Nissa took another step back. The hairs on her arms stood on end. “Are you—?”

“Me? No. But I’m flattered you think that my kind has enough of a soul to nurture a spark.”

“I don’t think . . .”

The vampire held up his hands. “Uh, uh, no need to injure the goodwill you have just built between us. It is a solid foundation for the trust I am about to place in you.”

Trust? A vampire? This creature was just as likely to be a servant of Ulamog as he was to be a slayer of elves. Nissa did not trust vampires. She grounded her feet, centered herself, and drew on the power of the land to clear her mind. “There is no goodwill between us. Give me one good reason not to end you where you stand.”

“I have four very good reasons. I will give them to you in a moment. They are gifts. From Anowon.”

Nissa shivered; she hadn't heard the old vampire's name in a very long time. She searched the shadows. Had he found her again? Was this an ambush?



Anowon, the Ruin Sage | Art by Dan Scott

"Don't panic, little elf. There is no cause for concern. Anowon is not here."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know where he is. He has been gone for many years. But before he disappeared he spoke of you frequently; told me of your powers, your abilities, your spark. You are the first I thought of when I began this quest, however I never expected to find you still here. I am so very glad that I did." He pulled out a small piece of folded gray silk and offered it to her.

"What is it?" Nissa didn't touch it.

With a second display of tenderness, the vampire peeled back the topmost layer, revealing four small seeds that rolled together into the center. He pointed to each in turn. "Kolya, red mangrove, jaddi, bloodbriar."

"Bloodbriar." Nissa's heart ached at the thought of the beloved plant from her home continent, but her instincts told her that he must be lying. "But Bala Ged was destroyed."

"All but this seed." The vampire carefully folded the silk back over, tucking it into itself. "You must understand what it is I am about to ask you to do, Planeswalker Nissa, you must understand how I hope that you will save Zendikar."

Nissa did. He was asking her to take the seeds . . . to another plane.

"I know it may seem an odd thing for a vampire to ask. But in these end times we will all find ourselves doing odd things. You see, I saw much of myself in the bloodbriars of Bala Ged—deadly, nettled, twisted." He smiled. "So if they persist out there somewhere," he waved dismissively up toward the sky, "then in some way so too will I. So too will all the rest of us." He offered her the silk one more time. "Please, take them."

Nissa narrowed her eyes, studying the vampire. She was having trouble understanding this creature; he was not like the other vampires she had known. “You are serious?”

“Nothing could be more serious than the end of a world.”

“And you believe this is the end?”

“I know it is.” The vampire leaned in closer and whispered, “And so do you, Nissa.”

The accusation stung. The vampire was wrong. Nissa didn’t think this was the end. Zendikar was still fighting. There was still a chance. “You’re wrong,” she said. “These are troubled times, yes. But there are many of us who are willing to stand up and go to battle. And the land itself fights back too. You’ve experienced the Roil.”



Zendikar’s Roil | Art by Sam Burley

“All valiant efforts, I am sure. Much like your effort today.” The vampire swept his arm around the corrupted encampment; the woman he had carried back had since joined the ranks of the dead. “The problem is that effort is not enough. Especially when you are outnumbered as you are.”

“We can change the numbers. There are three less spawn in this forest than there were this morning.” Nissa countered.

“And how many more were sired across the plane today to take their place?”

Nissa started to speak, but realized she had nothing to say.

The vampire steepled his fingers. “It is not your fault. These are impossible odds. There are hundreds of thousands of Eldrazi and they will keep coming. It doesn’t matter how many you kill. Not as long as the titans are still here. You are a smart elf, you know I am right. You have known for a long time.”

Nissa bristled.

“I don’t mean to offend. I am merely stating the facts. Even you are not powerful enough to slay a titan.”

It was the truth. Nissa flushed. She had tried to tell Zendikar that she was not enough. If only it had listened.

“You are just postponing the inevitable. But you are running out of time to leave Zendikar.”

“I won’t—” The vampire cut Nissa off.

“You will. Which is why I am glad our paths crossed when they did.” He pressed the seeds into her hand. “You are a powerful Planeswalker, and you care deeply for Zendikar. You were made for this task. Save our world, Nissa Revane.”

She could. For the first time, Nissa felt that she could do what was being asked of her.

She took the seeds.

Immediately, her cheeks flooded with hot, guilty blood. She remembered the elemental standing behind her. She had still not adjusted to having an elemental that didn’t return to the land when she ceased directing it. Ashaya had been there the whole time; it had watched her take the seeds.

Nissa turned, slowly, to face the Awoken World. The elemental stood tall above her, stoic in the face of her betrayal. The shame spread through Nissa’s gut. “Wait.” She looked back to the vampire . . . but he was gone. So too were the bodies of the fallen.

She made no move to search for him or pursue him. She could have, but she did not.

Instead, she stood there in the empty, corrupted camp in the shadow of the elemental, the silk turning sweaty in her palm. She could feel the lives of the seeds within, the trees they might someday become—each of them a small part of Zendikar. So why should she feel guilty for wanting to save them?

“Why shouldn’t I at least try?” She looked to Ashaya. “I’ve been telling you all this time that I can’t do what you want me to do.” She paused, but of course Ashaya had no response. “But this, this is something I can do. At least this way you’ll know,” she tucked the silk into her pocket, “you’ll know that Zendikar goes on. That will have to be enough.”

Ashaya reached out, holding its open palm toward Nissa. Then the elemental formed a fist and pulled it in toward its chest before extending its hand again and slowly unfurling each finger.

“I still don’t understand,” Nissa whispered. “Maybe someone else will.”

Nissa’s words didn’t stop Ashaya; the elemental preformed the gesture a second time.

As it began a third repetition, Nissa pushed on it, willing it to return back to the land, back to Zendikar. It was time.

But the elemental did not heed Nissa’s direction. Its roots did not twist into the ground, its branches did not buckle.



Ashaya, the Awoken World | Art by Raymond Swanland

Nissa pushed harder. “Go.”

Ashaya inched closer to Nissa and stretched out its hand, performing the gesture yet again.

“Enough.” Nissa gathered her strength and directed it at the elemental, forcing it away.

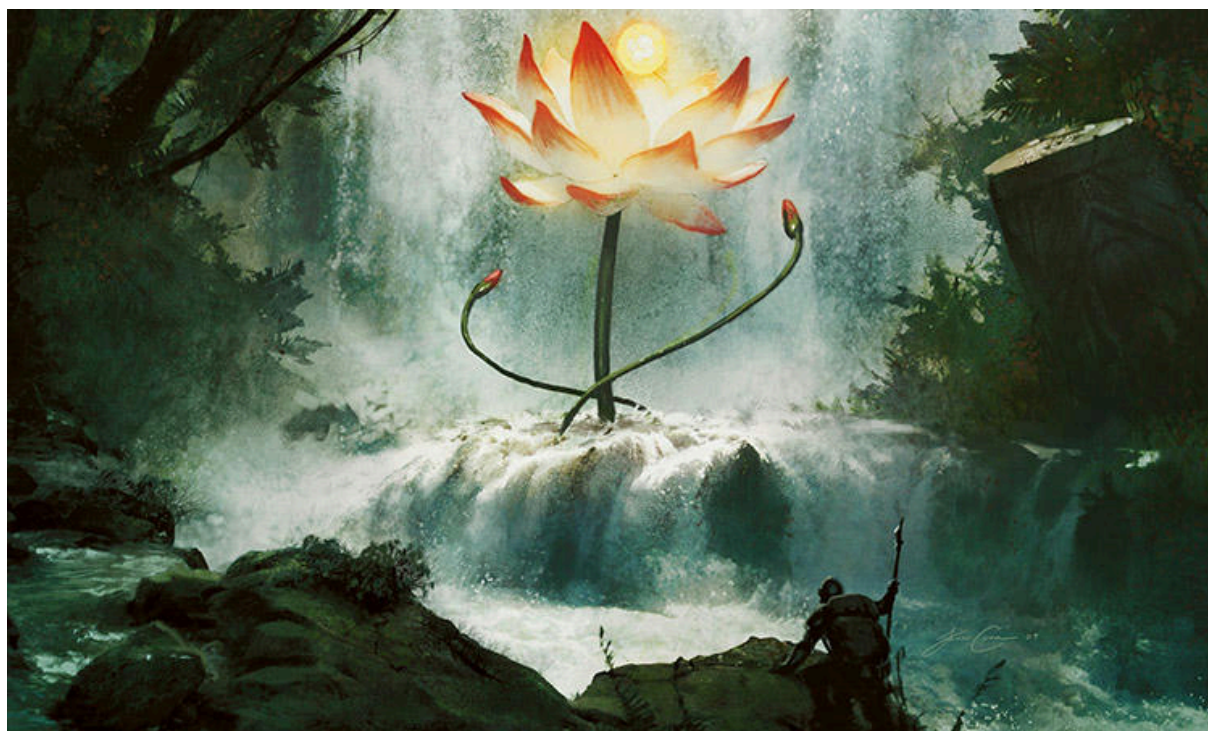
But it merely stood there, reaching and grasping, and opening its palm to the sky.

“Why do you keep doing that? I don’t understand,” Nissa said. “I don’t understand what that means.” She mimicked Ashaya’s movement. “What is this?”

As Ashaya made a fist and pulled it into its chest, so too did Nissa. “Yes I see this, but . . .” Nissa’s breath hitched. She had just unfurled her first finger, and streaming out from it was a glowing green line, one that dove down into the land on the far side of the corruption and then emerged again further on, winding around trees and twisting through the leaves of plants. It shimmered with power.

Not daring to breathe, Nissa unfurled her second finger. Another line appeared. This one extending in a slightly different direction then shooting upward and weaving through the tallest branches of the forest.

Three more fingers, three more powerful connections. The world opened up before Nissa, glowing green and radiating power. These were the leylines; Nissa had heard of their power, the power of the land, of Khalni Heart, the power that flowed through the whole world.



Khalni Heart Expedition | Art by Jason Chan

A final leyline streamed out from her skyward-facing palm. This was the thickest of the lines, with the girth of a sturdy root. It stretched from Nissa's palm out to Ashaya, winding in and out of the roots and branches that formed the elemental's chest, arms, and legs. This was the line that connected Nissa to all that Ashaya was, this was the line that connected her to Zendikar's soul.

One.

It was not a word—not spoken aloud—rather it was a feeling that came to Nissa from Ashaya.

One.

The glowing, green power spread then from Nissa's palm up her arm and into her chest, and she understood. This power, these connections, they had been here all this time, they were what Ashaya had been trying to show Nissa. Now Nissa knew how to look.

Nissa moved her fingers one by one, feeling out the network. It was as though she had hundreds of new appendages, fingers that were trees, brambles for fists, the land itself for her arms and legs. The force of Zendikar surged through her . . . and pulsed from within her.

One.

She had been wrong. Hamadi had been wrong. Zendikar had not asked her to do this alone. It had not chosen her; there had been no choice to make. She was part of the world, connected to it like every other living thing. A tree does not choose a branch, the branch is merely part of the tree; it is one with the tree. When the tree grows, when the tree bends, or when the tree falls . . . so too does the branch. And when the branch rustles, when it sprouts leaves or bears fruit, so too does the tree. Nissa could not be chosen by Zendikar and she could not choose Zendikar, for she was one with Zendikar.

As long as Zendikar was in danger, so too was Nissa. And as long as the world was fighting back, so too would Nissa. Without question. Without hesitation.

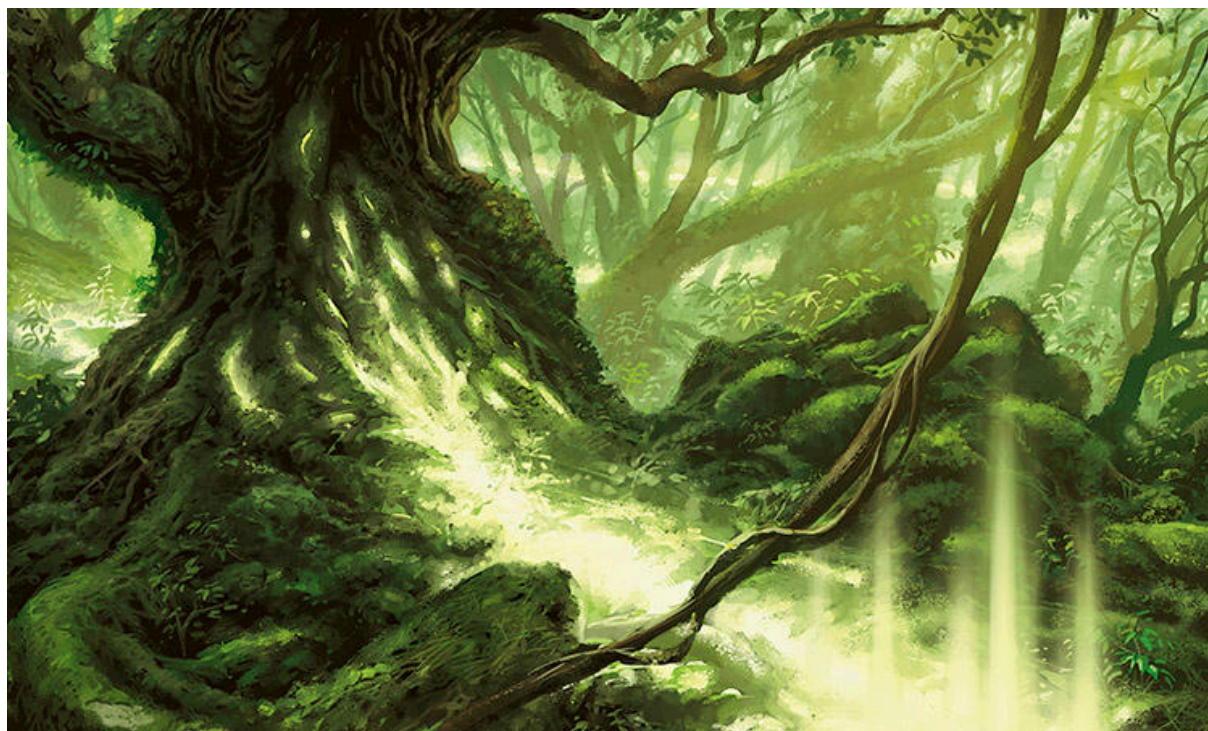
For Zendikar. The sentiment radiated out from Ashaya.

“For Zendikar.” Nissa’s voice cracked.

For Zendikar! Ashaya’s conviction filled Nissa and the glowing leylines that ran through her bubbled up with power.

“For Zendikar!” she cried

The whole world lit up, reflecting Nissa’s intensity as she charged into the forest.



Leyline of Vitality | Art by Jim Nelson

She ran alongside the trail of corruption that had been made by the tentacled Eldrazi as it left the encampment; she had a target for her passion.

After just a few steps, it was clear that the forest was an utterly new place . . . and it was incredible.

Though she had run through the trees countless times before, she had never experienced anything like this. *This*, Nissa thought, *is what it’s like to be truly bonded to the land.*

The world reacted to her presence. Each time one of her feet landed, it was on a clear patch of ground. Holes that might turn her ankle closed. Roots that might trip her instead cradled her foot and then launched her forward, propelling her to the next bramble that would spring her toward a branch, which would catch her and swing her to a gentle landing on a bed of moss. This was what it was like to be one with Zendikar.

Ashaya loped along at Nissa’s side, her presence a given—Nissa did not need to exert any energy to will the elemental to move, nor to direct her on a path, for Ashaya knew. She knew where Nissa would go, she knew what Nissa needed, she knew what Nissa felt.

Ashaya knew Nissa’s remorse.

And she knew Nissa’s determination to make the world safe so that one day she could plant the seeds she now carried in Zendikar’s own soil.

The vampire had been right to give Nissa the seeds. He had also been right that Nissa could save Zendikar. But he had been wrong that she would have to leave. He had been wrong to think that she could not destroy the titan. With the force of the world behind her, with the power of Zendikar coursing through her, there was nothing that she could not do.

She looked to Ashaya. The two felt the same. Bold. Powerful. Ready. Together they were enough.

A rock face parted to let Nissa through, revealing the tentacled Eldrazi. The monstrosity, undeterred by the fact that it only had one remaining tentacle, was skittering across a bed of flowers, leaving corruption in its wake.

No more.

Nissa rushed forward. Pieces of the rock face—the land along with the brambles and moss that grew on it—came along with her, tracing the glowing leylines that flowed through her arms, aligning themselves with her movements, becoming extensions of her own form.



Vastwood Zendikon | Art by Rob Alexander

One.

When her feet hit the corruption behind the Eldrazi, Nissa wound up to strike. The land formed a spear around her hand, glowing from within. Beside her, Ashaya mirrored her movements. Their blows were focused, sure . . . and deadly. The spear of land sliced through the Eldrazi just as Ashaya's fist smashed its bony plate.

The horror let out a final deflating chitter as it collapsed.

It would never harm another blade of Zendikar's grass.

Nissa stood above its fallen form, her breath coming in great gasps. Not because she was tired—because she was invigorated, because she wanted more. It was time to stand up. It was time to fight. It was time to save the world.

Ashaya understood what Nissa felt; Nissa could feel the elemental, too. She lowered her massive hand, resting it on the ground just in front of Nissa's feet, open, inviting.

As Nissa stepped onto the elemental's branch-like finger, a gust of glowing green power swirled up around her, filling her to overflowing. "For Zendikar!" she cried.

Ashaya lifted Nissa and placed the elf in the saddle formed by the two thick wooden horns on the top of her head. The glowing leylines responded, weaving from Ashaya through Nissa and back. The lines secured Nissa as Ashaya took off, surging through the forest, one giant stride after another.

They were on the hunt . . . and their prey was an Eldrazi titan.

Nissa spread her arms wide, sending a call down the lines that ran out from her fingers.



Groundswell | Art by Chris Rahn

In answer, an army of baloth-sized elementals took shape. They fell in alongside Nissa and Ashaya, joining the charge, joining the fight to save their world.