

Dreams of the Damned

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The demon Ob Nixilis is shrouded in mystery. We do not know his origins—where he comes from, or even whether he was always a demon. We do know this: He was once a Planeswalker, until he was stripped of his spark and trapped on the wild-mana plane of Zendikar thousands of years ago. Since then, he has slowly enacted a plan to regain his power and escape.

Demons don't sleep.

I remember sleep, of course. And I remember how it felt at first, my little consolation prize, that I no longer needed to sacrifice a third of my life to my pathetic mortal limitations. This form feels little pain. It does not tire. But that just gave me more time alone with my rage. I was a conqueror. I *am* a conqueror. Yet I had suffered two defeats in succession. The first robbed me of my body. The second of my spark.

In my youth, I thought myself invincible. I thought I had *proven* myself invincible. Conquering your first world is the hardest, after all. My power grew as I moved from world to world, taking anything that would make the next taking easier. When I heard of the Veil, it seemed too great a prize to refuse. I was a fool. Such a weapon can only destroy the one who wields it.



Deep beneath the surface, the demon worked in silence. The cavern was illuminated only by the faint glow of runic script, etched into the dozens of hedrons that lined the walls. He rotated a hedron a few degrees and spoke a brief incantation. The runes flared, orange and brilliant, but the light faded quickly. He rotated a second hedron, repeated the spell, and watched as the runes flared again. The light lasted slightly longer this time, an almost imperceptible increase in duration. The demon scratched notes into the stone floor with an obsidian claw and moved on to a third hedron.

To know the freedom of the Multiverse, and to have it stripped away—it is a tomb. To know that there are endless worlds to bring beneath my heel, to sip from fonts of power unimaginable...and then it's gone. All of it gone. And I am stuck on this disgusting little world, lolling atop this colony of scurrying insects, not even fit to be ruled.

When the fullest depth of that fact sunk in, that was the first time I wished for sleep. I wished to tire, to rest, to let the torment end, if just for a few fitful hours. That can never happen.



So what to do to pass the time? The people of this world offer little amusement. The humans of this place are cowards and vagabonds. I've hunted them, toyed with them. So dull. The elves are primitive, but at least they'll stand and fight. Their bones snap like the game birds I used to hunt, so many centuries and planes ago. And there're only so many goblins you can crush before the act loses its charm. Well, most of its charm. They do make a very funny noise. Then there's the kor. They avoid me. I avoid them. Because in each of their smug, chalky faces, I see *her*.

Zendikar's self-appointed protector. *Nahiri*.

Deep beneath the surface, a power stirred. Lines of magic buried beneath countless tons of rock and dirt slowly came alive, and a passage opened. A pale green light escaped from the depths, and the demon curled his wings tight to his body so as to squeeze into the narrow path.

Could there be a more miserable place in all the Eternities? I was drawn to it like so many others. The mana here is rich and powerful. This place is a trap. I thought that with the power to be gained here, I could purge my curse, burn out this infection and restore my form. I never got the chance to find out. I had barely finished getting my bearings when she attacked.

She never showed a scrap of emotion as she did it. Maybe the slightest hint of *pity*. Her binding magic was like nothing I had ever encountered. It was never even a fight, and I couldn't even scream as she bound the hedron into me.

In that moment, everything ceased.

The walls of that passage lurched, and crushed stone rained down on the demon's back. The sides of the passage suddenly crushed together. The depths of Zendikar had detected an intruder, and the stone itself sought to purge him. He bought himself a moment by bracing himself between the walls, and he muttered a spell. The vitality of the stone was drained away, the animating force snuffed out, and the rock crumbled in a perfect sphere around the demon's crouching form. Through tiny cracks, the green glow beckoned him on. He began to dig.

My curse was stopped. The call of that faraway place just vanished. But all my power vanished with it. When I could finally rise from the ground, the bones in my shoulders crumbled. My wings were useless—they fell off a few days later. The thing she put inside me made me small. Weak. That is not something I can ever forgive. And for that, one day, I will have my revenge.



That was *centuries* ago. I have never seen her again. But I see her face in my mind as if it were yesterday. Some of the vampires here live that long, but they have the good sense to either go mad or forget. Did she know that by doing this to me, she would preserve my mind? Over time, it became clear to me that the hedron inside me was an object of great power.

Power. The universal language.

The demon had clawed at the stone for weeks. He spent days slowly tearing through much denser strata. The air in the tiny pocket of stone was thin, replenished only by a small runed sphere he had taken from a merfolk trader. Twice, he had stopped, in order to let his claws regrow. The closer he came to the source of the glow, the faster he healed.

I studied the hedrons for centuries. I know their magic better than anyone save the one who made them. And when a Planeswalker would come to this place, I would make a point of making introductions. Visitors to a strange new place needs a guide; they need information. I was happy to help. There have been dozens over the countless years. I let them know about my condition. I let the information filter out past the boundaries of this cesspool. And sure enough, some arrogant child finally took my lure.

One of the most important lessons a conqueror needs to learn is that when others believe themselves to be smarter than you, you just let them keep on believing that. Right up until they stop believing anything at all. After all this time waiting, some proud Planeswalker whelp came to find me; to strike me down and extract the hedron. Hundreds of years of planning to make this day come about, and all I could focus on was putting up just enough of a fight so as to not draw suspicion. I never doubted that this day would come.

It was all I could do, lying there in the swamp, not to laugh.

Deep beneath the surface, the demon reached gently into the tiny sphere of life. He removed a small handful of soil and a tiny flower, glowing green and gold, in his palm. It radiated power, warmth, and health. The ancient passages snapped open, and he cradled it gingerly as he walked back to the surface, his laughter echoing off the walls.

The Eldrazi and their spawn rampage on. One can't help but admire the efficiency with which they exterminate and corrupt. From time to time, I muse on what I could accomplish with an army like that. No matter. Some misguided souls will come to fight the Eldrazi. They cannot help it, heroes are like ants swarming over a discarded sweet. When they arrive, they will need to know what I know. The hedrons were created for this—a weapon like no other, and I may be the only one alive who knows how they work.

But I know what else they can be used for as well.



The power is returning to me. I felt this world shudder when Bala Ged was destroyed. In that moment, I could smell the Multiverse again. My spark is within reach. I know what I must do. And that the only cost to regaining my spark will be the complete obliteration of the world I hate most among them all?

Demons may not sleep.

But we dream.