

Sabotage

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From set *Rivals of Ixalan*

Around 1,300 Years Ago

A soft breeze passed over an open steppe, herds of grass-eating beasts peacefully passed the walls of a great city of glass and stone, and in a ripple of air, a dragon tore through the sky from a faraway world.

His name was Ugin, and his purpose was, and always had been, singular.

Crowds of people gathered as he approached from above and cheered at the sight of the dragon. They guided him toward the center of the city. They smiled to see Ugin, for the Arbiter of Law told them the Spirit Dragon could be trusted. Ugin was led through the city with great fanfare, and eventually found his associate at the top of the stairs leading to what the citizens told him was the Palace of Justice.

The sphinx was a hieromancer who had lived for 10,000 years. His causes were noble even if his reasons were not.

“Ugin, my friend,” Azor said with a flourish of his wings and a bow of his head, “welcome to my newest home.”

The sphinx flicked his flight feathers, and a small pulse of law magic caused the crowd around them to turn around and leave.

“What brings you to this plane?” Azor asked.

The Spirit Dragon spoke to Azor. “When we last met, we discussed our common foe.”

“What of him?” asked Azor. He looked around nervously. “Is this world in danger?”

The destroyer had arrived suddenly on one of Azor’s patron worlds, wiped away Azor’s work, and built a new empire for his own cryptic purposes.

Ugin met the sphinx less than a decade later and revealed the scourge’s name, his methods, and his villainous history.

“Every world is in danger, as long as our enemy is free and whole. That is why I am here. I have devised a plan to rid the Multiverse of his influence, but I cannot do it without you.”

The sphinx replied, “I have established law on countless worlds. I have created structure where once there was none. I would be most honored to share the immensity of my gifts with you, dear friend.”

Ugin was pleased. “Together we will rid the Multiverse of Nicol Bolas.”

The plan they hatched required success on two fronts: they would need a means and opportunity to pull their enemy into their prison, and a lock to contain and neutralize him there. As they conversed, Azor excitedly outlined the hieromancy necessary to create an object that would enhance his own law magic—giving him the ability to summon the golden dragon from any location in the Multiverse. It would require the sacrifice of his own spark, but with Ugin’s assistance, that could be reclaimed after Nicol Bolas was destroyed. “There is a plane I have been wanting to bring order to—a world called Ixalan. I will build the Immortal Sun there, on the continent of Torrezon.”

Azor would no longer be a Planeswalker, but the Immortal Sun would amplify his hieromancy with all the power of his severed spark, allowing him to work magic a mortal sphinx could never hope to create. Unaided, their foe would be summoned to the cage no matter what plane he was on. The device would also serve as a lock to their prison, ensuring their planeswalking enemy would have no means of escape. Ugin assured Azor that, thanks to centuries of planning, he had secreted away a means to remove Nicol Bolas from existence for good. They needed only capture the golden dragon, and their task would be complete.

“You will have to lure him to a specific location,” Azor said. “I will need to know where to aim in order to summon him to the prison.”

Ugin, naturally, had thought all of this through, for he was as cunning as he was conniving. “I will lure him to Tarkir.”

“Tell me more of this *lawbringer*,” drawled Nicol Bolas as he casually tore off the right arm of the minor functionary he held in his talon. An elf, the leader of whatever-this-place-was and the overseer of who-cares.

As Nicol Bolas used the severed appendage to slap the man repeatedly, he reflected that he should not allow himself to be so easily tempted into savagery by the foolishness of mortals, particularly not when even the slightest use of his telepathic ability would suffice to get the information he needed. Nevertheless, the slaps had the desired effect, dispelling the man’s shock long enough to produce an answer. There was a certain feeling of joy Bolas achieved only by punishing stupidity.

While all this elf’s fellow bureaucrats—and everyone else in the city—had been sensibly running for their lives, this one pathetic fool had remained in the plaza. He had begun hurling insults. At an elder dragon. He had sworn that the lawbringer would soon return, and would once more bring an end to evil. *Such tired invective*, thought Bolas as the elf blubbered, telling all he knew and begging for his life.

The sphinx. Again, the sphinx. This was the third plane Bolas had encountered where the people revered a sphinx who had come from a faraway land. He knew now that it was no coincidence. The stories were too similar—always the sphinx came from a distant, unknown place, and always he imposed a system of justice on the populace before disappearing again, leaving laborious legal codes and, in the case of this plane, pretentious statuary in his wake. *A planeswalker*, Bolas thought, *a hieromancer most like, and, it would seem, an enemy*.

The statue, large in its own right, had been installed (rather too ostentatiously in Bolas’s view) atop the largest building in the city—an official-looking marble hall that towered over the plaza. The dragon carefully lowered the bleeding bureaucrat onto the head of the statue before releasing him, waiting for a moment to be sure the elf found steady footing. “Fear not, mortal,” sneered Bolas as he made to depart. “From all you’ve told me, I am sure your lawbringer will return to aid you well before you bleed to death.”

“Azor,” the weakling had said. The sphinx was called Azor. Resolving to learn as much as he could about this Azor, Bolas smiled contemptuously for a moment at the man teetering on the statue. Then he unfurled his giant wings and took to the sky.

Over many years, and across many planes, Nicol Bolas sought clues to the sphinx’s agenda. Finally, on a plane wracked by war, Bolas came upon a lawmage staring forlornly down at a broken statue—yet another garish reminder of the fabled lawbringer.

The Arbiter of Law turned our world against itself, the lawmage thought, and a flood of images flowed from her mind as Nicol Bolas attuned to her and began to unravel the threads of her existence. *To think that I worshipped him as a savior when his solutions only broke a world that did not need fixing. To think that the day I spent hiding in the Palace of Justice, listening to him and the Spirit Dragon plot the end of the True Evil, I thought I was as close as any mortal would ever be to the divine . . .*

Nicol Bolas savored the taste of the lawmage's ultimate despair as she died. *A true evil*, he thought, *how flattering . . .*

Azor stood on the shores of Torrezon in a maelstrom of his own magic.

The sphinx performed a feat of hieromancy that no being had ever attempted and none would ever be able to match, severing his spark to create the artifact he called the Immortal Sun. The sphinx stood atop his masterpiece, exhausted yet ever prideful.

He spoke across worlds, for this was a time when Planeswalkers possessed the strength of gods. "Ugin, my strength is increased tenfold with the help of my creation. I am ready to secure our prisoner."

Ugin heard, and answered in kind. His voice traveled across the Blind Eternities and resonated clearly in Azor's mind. "Our life's work will be complete soon, my friend," Ugin said, coating "friend" with the lure of kinship Azor had never been able to resist. "I have only to bait the trap and wait for the destroyer to arrive."

Ugin soared above the craggy mountains of Tarkir, so absorbed in making preparations that he could not suppress his utter shock when his nemesis appeared before him.

Bolas's wings spread wide in Ugin's path, like a billowing cloak, and his scales glinted in the light of the storm around him.

"Your idiot cat is too fond of statues of himself," Nicol Bolas mused. "I might not even have been listening to your charming long-distance talks if he hadn't left so many little clues here and there."

Ugin bristled. "The Immortal Sun will seal you in your prison, Planeswalker."

Nicol Bolas laughed, and launched himself at his foe as his laugh broadened into a deafening roar.

They fought and raged through the air, titans in a tempest.



Crux of Fate | Art by Michael Kormarck

But Bolas lifted a claw, and hundreds of pairs of dragon eyes looked down on Ugin in unison. They curved their great bodies and dove to attack. The Spirit Dragon tried to escape, but was caught in a tempest of fire and claws.

He hit the ground. He would have died, perhaps, but a man out of time intervened. That man preserved Ugin's body in a cocoon of stone and vanished.

And Nicol Bolas planeswalked away, never to return, for he had won.

Azor waited for a year.

He kept vigil, standing atop the Immortal Sun with his attention focused on the heavens, waiting for a signal from his friend.

But no signal ever came, and by the time Azor realized that something must have happened to Ugin, there was no dragon to summon. No foe to seal in his trap. No great sacrifice to be made in the fight against evil.

Azor was left without a spark, and his prison without a prisoner.

He waited for decades before finally realizing that there was nothing left for him to do here except what he did best: build yet another system of law there, on Torrezon.

He gifted the Immortal Sun to a monastery that would later give rise to the Legion of Dusk, but they were inept, so Azor took the Immortal Sun back before it could be used by Torrezon's would-be conquerors.

He gifted it to the Sun Empire, and for a while their kingdoms prospered, but their leaders grew paranoid, launching preemptive attacks on their neighbors. So Azor took his masterpiece back again, this time sealing himself within the walls of Orazca and charging the River Heralds—the only wise people on Ixalan—to make certain no one could find him or awaken the power within.

For years beyond counting, Azor brooded upon his towering throne in an empty city, cursing the name of the friend who had abandoned him.

And all the while, unbeknownst to Azor, Ugin slept.

VRASKA



Sanctum of the Sun | Art by Yeong-Hao Han

Jace told Vraska everything he knew about Nicol Bolas.

The failed attempt to take the Planar Bridge, the army of Eternals on Amonkhet.

Vraska in turn told him everything she knew about Nicol Bolas. The Meditation Plane and the spell-key that granted her access, how frightened she was that Bolas would kill her if she failed him. The more Vraska told Jace, the more they both began to realize the immensity of Nicol Bolas's plan. Vraska felt guilty and terrified in equal measure, as though the weight of all the planes was bearing down on her.

She held her head in her hands. "I'm supposed to contact one of Bolas's associates, and they will retrieve the Immortal Sun—"

"—using the Planar Bridge," Jace finished with a grim shake of his head. "It's Tezzeret. He's the one you're meant to call."

Vraska briefly shook her head. She didn't know who that was. Jace grimaced. "The man with the . . . arm. From when I was younger."

Vraska swore with revulsion.

Jace rubbed his face in his hands. "Bolas sent Tezzeret to Kaladesh to retrieve a portal that can transport objects. He sent you to retrieve something that locks planeswalkers on a plane—"

"And he went to Amonkhet to blow up his corpse factory. What does he plan to do with zombies that are stuck on a dead plane?"

Jace's face went pale. Vraska could see the whites of his eyes. He shut them and groaned. "They aren't just corpses anymore. They were treated with lazotep; it's this mineral that affixed to the Eternals' organic matter—"

“—To make them objects that could survive interplanar travel.” Vraska shook her head. “He made an army he could transport across the Multiverse. And the Immortal Sun will make sure no one could leave once they’ve arrived. Jace, is there *anything* that might tell us what his endgame is?”

Jace paused. “I need to check. One moment.”

He shut his eyes, and Vraska waited.

The room had grown stuffy, and little motes dappled the beams of sunlight that shone through the opening to the outside. She could feel her heart beating a worried rhythm in her chest, but for two entire minutes, Jace remained entirely still.

At last he opened his eyes, and looked at her with the saddest expression she had ever seen on someone’s face.

“Show me,” Vraska commanded.

And Jace did.

The air rippled with the now-familiar signs of illusion, and Vraska watched through Jace’s eyes.



Hour of Devastation | Art by Simon Dominic

Gold scales. Sandstone. Heat. Rough sand on his lips and in his eyes and in his throat. Broken, doomed friends. He was trying to break into Nicol Bolas’s mind. Sense what the dragon’s plan was, stop him from doing harm, and for a brief moment, *he had done it*, he saw the goal, and the answer stopped his heart in his chest—

Ravnica was writ large upon the ambition in Nicol Bolas’s mind.

It was not purposefully laid out, as traps of the mind often are, but woven into the dragon’s intentions, stamped broad and bright across his subconscious.

Nicol Bolas noticed Jace's presence, and retaliated by slamming his psychic strength into the mage's mind. But when he did, and when the dragon scoured his insides, Vraska felt some kind of trap being sprung, and though Bolas managed to scramble Jace's memories, a part of Jace's mind propelled him from Amonkhet to Ixalan.

Ravnica was Nicol Bolas's goal.

Everything led there.

Vraska opened her eyes, and Jace's projection ceased.

She realized her hands were trembling.

"He wants to unleash an army. On our *home*. With my *help*."

They were both very quiet. It was too much. Too large, too overwhelming. The object Vraska had voyaged for months to find was hanging above them.

Vraska briskly stood up. She paced, swearing over and over and over, picking up a rock and throwing it at the Immortal Sun above.

"If I don't deliver the Sun I'm trapped here, and if I do deliver it Nicol Bolas will destroy Ravnica. Ravnica is *our home*!"

Jace was silent.

"And you!" said Vraska. "He'll look in my mind see that I met you! That I know you, that all of this happened. He's going to kill us both!"

She sat down and tried to breathe away her panic. No matter what happened, the rest of the Golgari would suffer. No matter what happened, she would die.

"This has all been such a farce," Jace said weakly. "Kaladesh, Amonkhet, here. The Gatewatch wasn't protecting anything. Not really. I've let everyone down."

Vraska's head was in her hands. She was rambling, trying to work out the plan verbally. "Nicol Bolas intends to trap Planeswalkers and, what, eliminate the rest of the Ravnica? Muffle it so he can trap the enemies he's worried about and destroy somewhere else? Both of those seem pointless—if he wanted to kill Planeswalkers, he would just do it. I don't understand his intent."

Survival had been at the core of every choice Vraska had ever made. But now, she could not see a way out. She would either remain trapped on Ixalan while Ravnica burned, or else return and be killed immediately by the dragon for working alongside his enemy. No matter what she chose, so long as Nicol Bolas was able to peer into her mind, her home would be destroyed.

But what if he looked and saw nothing?

A terrible idea sparked in her mind. A terrible, brilliant idea.

Vraska closed her eyes and let out a long, shaking breath. It was the most frightening idea she had ever had in her life. But if Nicol Bolas looked and saw nothing, continued to trust her, allowed her the power he had promised her in return for her service . . . then she could hurt him all the more. *They* could hurt him all the more.

"Jace."

Jace glanced back at her, distraught.

"I have an idea, but you're not going to like it."

Jace shook his head. Helplessness was etched into the lines of his grimace. “I don’t know what I could do that could help.”

Vraska built up as much courage as she could to get the request past her lips. What she was about to say was terrifying, alarmingly drastic, and utterly necessary for their shared survival.

“I need you to temporarily take my memories of you.”

Jace recoiled in disgust. “I won’t do that.”

“Jace, it’s temporary and it’s the only way to keep us both from getting killed.” Vraska swallowed hard. She knew how awful this sounded, but the more the idea marinated in her mind the more she knew it was the right choice. The only choice.

Jace shook his head in disbelief. “I’m not hurting you like that—”

“You would not be hurting me, you would be protecting *us*,” she said emphatically. “You take my memories of you from my mind and hold onto them. Keep them safe, keep them away from the dragon’s view, so when he sees me he thinks the mission went off without a hitch. And then, on Ravnica, at the right moment, you give the memories back.”

Jace went still. Vraska could almost see him thinking through the plan. He spoke slowly and deliberately, in a tone drenched in fear with a dash of dangerous curiosity. “You want to betray Nicol Bolas.”

Vraska nodded. She found herself scowling, her tendrils waving with anger and determination. “If that bastard thinks I would stand by and allow him to conquer my plane with *my help*, he’s got another thing coming. And I’d betray him a thousand times over to stop him from doing to Ravnica what he did to Amonkhet.”

The revulsion on Jace’s face had been replaced with intrigue. He looked at Vraska with conspiratorial curiosity. “What sort of sabotage are we talking about?”

A splash of criminal talent had remained with him in the years since the manablade after all. Vraska gave Jace an approving look and began to talk out the beginnings of her plan.

“He promised me the title of guild leader. Law magic was built into the fabric of Ravnica, even before Azor arrived. The metaphysics of the plane are built around hierarchy, and guild leaders have access to that power, especially when they work together. I’ll accept the position and keep working as his lackey while you do your Guildpact thing and work on devising a plan. The dragon won’t suspect anything because I won’t be on your side until you *remind me* that I am. When you’re ready, and when we can hurt Nicol Bolas the most, return my memories and we’ll set whatever plan you make in motion. Even if he catches on to what you’re doing, he won’t think it will work, because he’ll think I’m loyal to him.”

The plan felt insane to say out loud, but Vraska knew it would work. Jace was probably the second-best telepath in the Multiverse *before* he remembered what his mentor had taught him. But now? He was whole. Fractured no more. If he could break a sphinx as a boy, what could he do as an adult?

Vraska could tell Jace was beginning to understand. He looked at her reluctantly. “You would trust me with your memories?”

“I trust you absolutely,” she responded with iron resolution.

How could she not? He was like her. Vraska realized for the first time that this was what a partnership felt like, and her conviction deepened. How strange it was, to have someone to trust and to be trusted in return.

The look on Jace's face told her that he had never heard that from anyone. He gave her a look of awe and sadness, briefly closed his eyes, and opened them once more.

"There's a technique Alhammarret taught me," Jace said with trepidation. He was leaning forward where he sat with his elbows on his knees. His body language had shifted away from guarded terror to problem-solving focus. "Oubevir's Maneuver. It's a way to smooth over evidence of mental tampering. I can reverse-engineer the spell Ugin put on me to further disguise the gap left behind. Bolas shouldn't be able to tell anything has been removed."

"Are you certain?"

"Bolas won't see the absence of something he wouldn't know to look for. He's too proud, and he doesn't know I'm here."

Vraska was beginning to feel hopeful. "Who on Ravnica could help come up with a sabotage plan?"

Jace thought for a moment and nodded. "Niv-Mizzet. He could challenge Nicol Bolas both physically and mentally, plus he'll be furious to know there's a dragon smarter than he is."

"Then we know what we have to do."

Vraska held out her hand. Jace took it in his and grasped tightly.

"Are you certain we don't have time to plan this out further?" he asked.

Vraska shook her head. "Ravnica is in danger and you've been gone for months."

Jace let out a long, slow breath. "Then let's do this before I talk myself out of it."

He looked at Vraska with calm determination. "You have my word as the Living Guildpact that your memories will be kept safe and returned intact. I swear to find a plan we can use against Nicol Bolas, and I swear to uphold my responsibility to protect Ravnica, my home."

Vraska spoke with confidence. "You have my word as captain of the *Belligerent* that I will do whatever it takes to sabotage Nicol Bolas upon the return of my memories. I swear to commit my conscious self to his destruction."

Vraska squeezed Jace's hand, and they let go. The pact was made.

A smile tugged at one corner of Jace's mouth. "Let's sabotage that bastard."

Vraska grinned.

She felt excited, terrified, but comforted all the same. Jace would keep a part of her safe, no matter what. They were going to save Ravnica.

"Where will you go after it's gone?" she asked, nodding up at the Immortal Sun.

Jace stood. "I need to meet my friends on Dominaria."

"To recruit them?"

"Mostly to apologize for being absurdly late."

"At least you have a good reason." Vraska shrugged.

"I won't stay on Dominaria after I find them, though." He went strangely quiet. A little crease was cut between his eyebrows. "The Guildpact belongs on Ravnica. I don't want to be like Azor."

Vraska understood why he would have that fear, holding the title he did. She nodded, and her mind wandered as Jace went quiet again.

After a moment she laughed a little. “I just realized I will still recognize you when I see you next . . . but I’ll definitely try to kill you.”

“I know,” he said sweetly.

Vraska couldn’t help but smile at that. What an odd secret he would have to keep.

She wondered how it would feel to remember Ixalan after it was over. Would she remember the *Belligerent*? Would she remember her friends? “Can you sense where my crew is?” she asked aloud.

Jace paused for a moment, listening for something that she could not hear. He nodded. “Yes. They’re in the room above. I can send Malcolm or Breeches a message, if you like.”

Vraska sighed with guilt. “Tell them both we’ve been captured. Tell them to return to the ship, Amelia’s in charge, and that this crew is the best thing that has ever happened to me. That’s the truth.”

Jace’s eyes briefly lit with the azure glow of his magic. “It’s done,” he said sadly. “I’ll miss them, too.”

“We’ll see them again,” Vraska said with determination. “I don’t want to forget them.”

“You won’t,” Jace reassured her. “I’ll make certain of it.”

Vraska rolled her shoulders. Limber up. Time for the finale. “How should this work? Should I call Tezzeret first?”

“I’ll need to identify each memory you have of me, first,” Jace replied. “You’ll call Tezzeret after I’m through. I assume he’s fixed the Planar Bridge, so he’ll pull the Immortal Sun through that. Then we can planeswalk away.”

“Wait.” Vraska’s brows were knit with concern. “How will I know my memories are real when I get them back?”

Jace moved to stand across from her. “I’ll call you by your title when I see you next, before I return your memories.”

“You’ll call me Guild Leader?”

His gaze softened. “I’ll call you Captain.”

Happiness tugged at the lines of her eyes. “That will work.”

He reached toward her, hands held up. “May I?” he asked. Vraska nodded, and he placed his fingers on either side of her head.

Vraska smiled. “After all this is over . . . can I show you Tin Street Market back on Ravnica?”

Jace returned a sad little smile of his own. “I remember where Tin Street Market is.”

“Yes, but . . . I want to give you a tour. Get some coffee. I know a really good bookstore.”

“You like books?” Jace asked, a hopeful, happy look in his eyes.

Vraska nodded. “I’ll get a history, you can get some schematics or whatever it is you like to read,” she teased.

He laughed. “I like memoirs.”

“Really? *You* like memoirs?”

“I like interesting people,” he said with a soft and bashful smile.

Vraska smiled. “It’s a date.”

She nodded and closed her eyes. “Talk to Niv-Mizzet. Find a plan that needs the guild leaders to work, and save me for last. Don’t let the other dragon notice. And then . . .”

“Sabotage,” Jace finished excitedly.

He opened a connection between their minds. Vraska suddenly felt as though she had been standing on a stage behind a curtain that was now being gently raised. His presence was polite, but she felt him tiptoeing his way through her mind.

If I go near anything you don’t want me to see, just say so and I’ll back away.

Vraska nodded.

I’ll also leave some memories for Nicol Bolas to find so he doesn’t see any gaps. Is that all right?

Yes, Vraska replied. She felt guilty she had seen so much of Jace’s own past.

That wasn’t your fault, Jace said, pulling up the memory of the riverbank for both of them to see. She felt as he watched it through her eyes, saw how bad things were down in the mud, lost in the flood of his own past. Having Jace present in her mind was strangely comforting, like watching a play alongside a companion. The two of them sifted through the memories of their shared moments, piecing them apart and laying them out. Jace let out a long mental whistle when he saw how he had first looked on that bird-excrement-covered island. They both smiled watching themselves fight side by side in the raid. Vraska felt herself tear up when she saw them talking in the galley.

Your story deserves to be told, Jace said.

He paused when he reached the end of the memory of the riverbank, of himself lost in grief and wrapped up in Vraska’s arms. Vraska knew Jace understood, with his mind linked to hers, that that was the first time she had touched someone willingly in many years.

Then, Vraska felt as if she were descending. The riverbank vanished, everything went dark and cloudy, and she was presented with something unfamiliar—a well constructed of weathered slate, and down inside of it the walls were lined with countless textures of memory. She saw her memories of Jace tied up in a bundle, placed within a box, sealed with an unbreakable ward. She felt Jace hiding the box away in the well and disguising its presence with a spell.

Safe and sound, Jace promised.

I’ll see you soon, Vraska said.

Tin Street Market, right? Coffee and a book? he asked hopefully.

Coffee and a book, she replied, happy. Her face felt warm, and Vraska smiled.

She could have sworn she heard the sound of rain.



Induced Amnesia | Art by Chris Rallis

Her thoughts were calm and cool, her body relaxed.

She felt like she was standing outside during a springtime shower.

Pleasant and refreshed.

She opened her eyes.

She blinked and looked around the empty room.

How did I get here?

It was stuffy, and an odd throne was standing at the far end. She had the sense that this room was not meant to be accessed by the public. She could hear scuffling in the room above. Above her was a large disc embedded in the ceiling. She pulled out the thaumatic compass and, sure enough, the needle pointed upward.

I found it!

Vraska held out her hands and performed the spell her sponsor had taught her months before.



Mastermind's Acquisition | Art by Svetlin Velinov

It was complicated, requiring intense focus and more energy than she expected. The spell shot out and away from her like a bolt of lightning.

Vraska waited for a full minute. She wondered if it had worked, and jumped in surprise when a violet circle opened up directly beneath the Immortal Sun.

She felt a strange shifting inside of herself as the Sun was pulled through to another plane. As the portal closed, Vraska planeswalked away.