

Episode 4: Into the Demons' Realm

Roy Graham & Jenna Helland

From set *Kaldheim*

For once in her time on Kaldheim, Kaya didn't need to worry about the cold. On the other side of Tyvar's Omenpath, a blast of hot, noxious air had greeted her. The sky was the first thing she saw: rolling dark clouds without the memory of a sun. The only light to be found came from the red thunderbolts that occasionally split the sky and the orange glow rising from somewhere below them.

Kaya stood with Tyvar at the top of a ridge of black, jagged rock. Over the lip, she could see a tarry morass spiderwebbed with smoldering orange ruptures, a vast expanse of lava whose surface had partially hardened into great chunks of black pumice floating on molten rock. Now and then, a pocket of lava would burst into a molten geyser, sending glowing chunks of lava spattering into the air. It was hard to imagine somewhere less hospitable to life—and yet, Tyvar seemed to look at the apocalyptic vista with nothing short of wonder.

"We made it," he said. "I wasn't sure we could."

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Kaya.

"The gods sealed this place long ago, after Varragoth first escaped, with powerful runes of warding. I've never opened an Omenpath here—no elf has. But Tibalt must have somehow damaged the wards."

That sword. It hadn't been any kind of magic she'd seen before—nothing like the portal Alrund had opened. "We've got to get that sword away from him. If he can rip open the doors to this place, who knows what else he can do with it?"

Tyvar pointed behind her. She turned, hand automatically reaching for her dagger—and finding, she remembered a moment later, nothing. It wasn't a threat he was pointing out, anyway.

Down on the partially cooled surface of the magma lake, a few oddly straight lines were carved out of the web of volcanic ruptures. After a moment, her eyes adjusted to the low light, and she saw what had been carved into the basalt, waiting for their arrival: an orange molten arrow.

"Well, among the many things Tibalt's been accused of, subtlety's not one of them," muttered Kaya.

In an easy, almost practiced motion, Tyvar hopped over the lip of the ridge. He kicked off a spire of rock, then slid down a slope of glassy gravel. His momentum stopped just in front of the magma flats, where he looked back up at her. "Coming?"



Immersturm Skullcain | Art by: Cliff Childs

Fun as it would have been to hop between lily pads of cooled stone, Kaya didn't feel like taking a dunk into lava if she missed a jump. Apparently, neither did Tyvar; once she'd gotten down to the edge of the lake, he'd pressed his fingertips into the blackened shore and closed his eyes.

"Hang on," he said. "I want to try something."

Across the magma, the basalt shore began to creep out. The stone didn't just expand or double up on itself, either—it seemed to *grow*, tendrils of rock twining together, knitting themselves into a bridge. When he opened his eyes, Tyvar seemed just as surprised as she was.

She stepped gingerly onto it. It was subtly ridged, latticed in places in a way she didn't think stone was naturally capable of. It was, she found herself thinking, oddly beautiful.

First, he turns those trolls to stone, now this. The kid's a transmuter. But that wasn't all he was. Somehow, Tyvar had sparked without realizing it—gone all the way to Zendikar, just thinking it was another of Kaldheim's realms.

Back in Gnottvold, when he'd opened that Omenpath, Tyvar had made it clear that he was going in whether or not she was coming with him. If he was just another headstrong hero intent on some glorious death, Kaya would have let him go—after all, Kaldheim had no shortage of those, and she had work to do. But Tyvar was a planeswalker, and one who didn't know what that really meant. Somehow, it seemed like a waste to let Tibalt kill him before he'd seen more of the Multiverse. She tried to tell him a bit about it all as they walked.

"These planes are like the realms, then? And connecting them—an even vaster World Tree?" he said.

"Well, without the literal branches. And no giant animals in the spaces between." At least as far as she knew. "More importantly, they're not connected in the same way. Portals don't just show up, and there aren't spells for crossing between them. The only way to move from one to the other is to be one of us."

"A planeswalker," said Tyvar, kicking a hunk of blackened pumice off into the lava. "A fine offer. But I think I'll pass. There's glory aplenty for me in Kaldheim, and more realms than I could explore in one

lifetime. Besides, how would people know to tell stories about me if I left the World Tree altogether? I'd have to start anew each time."

Yeah, thought Kaya. *That's the tricky part.* New friends, new enemies, new rules to every plane. Always the stranger, the newcomer. Dropped again and again into other people's squabbles, other people's wars. It was exciting, at first. Then, after a while, it got exhausting. But, like it or not, it wasn't a choice.

Kaya grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around. "You don't get to pass, kid. That's not how this works. You're a planeswalker, whether you like it or not, and next time you wind up somewhere full of magic, monsters, and people you don't understand, you'll need"—she scrambled for words—"you'll need some kind of code. A set of rules." Kaya's code was simple: do no harm unless they had it coming and somebody's paying you for the privilege. Sure, once or twice she'd gotten mixed up in messes she should have stayed out of; now and then, if she was feeling charitable, she'd off a particularly troublesome ghost pro bono. But the code was important—it was the only thing that followed her from plane to plane, the only thing she could count on. What would Tyvar be able to count on when he moved on from Kaldheim one day? What glory or heroic tales would matter then?

Tyvar pulled his arm free, his annoyance plain as day on those chiseled yet somehow boyish features. "I have a code—the same one passed down by the warriors of Skemfar for untold generations. I'm in no need of a stranger's schooling on such things."

"I'm just trying to help you!" she said. Nobody had ever done that for her and look how she had ended up. Mercenary, thief, killer. Tibalt was in no position to accuse her of anything—but he'd been right.

"I am not a child, and I don't need your help. As I've demonstrated, I'm more than capable of handling myself." With that, he stormed off, down the path of black rock.

Stubborn fool. Why was she even still here? She had other paying work on Kaldheim, after all. A monster she was supposed to be tracking down.

She was still deciding whether to turn around when the first harpoon cracked into the blackened path, inches from Tyvar's foot. It was a crude weapon, rough iron ringed in barbs, and heavy enough to sink straight into rock. For an instant, Tyvar seemed too stunned to move—and he didn't notice the second one screaming toward him.

Kaya reached him just in time, turning his torso to ghostly light just as the iron harpoon whistled through him. He stumbled back, planted one hand on the path, and turned his arms charcoal black.

"On our right!" snapped Kaya.

Cutting a path toward them, through the chunks of cooled magma, was—improbably—a ship. It reminded her of the longships the Omenseekers had piloted, but while those were sleek and narrow, meant to slip into narrow channels and explore remote coves, this vessel was meant for only one thing. Spikes ringed the outer edge, cruel and narrow; the prow was an iron wedge with a chipped, battering edge. In place of sails, a sheet of flame seemed to billow and catch whatever unearthly current was pushing them closer.

"Demons," said Tyvar. "Ready yourself."



Demon Berserker Token | Art by: Grzegorz Rutkowski

As the ship drew nearer, Kaya could make out three figures on board. On one, an iron helmet added rows of horns to the two that naturally curled from his forehead; a black visor concealed his eyes. Another had one hand replaced by a massive flanged mace, the ridges crusted over with blood. Near the prow, on an elevated platform, was the biggest—a thickly built brute with his right side covered in black iron plates. The membranes of his great wings were rent and torn from past skirmishes. With his left hand, he hefted another harpoon, leaning back for the throw.

This one, Tyvar was prepared for. With a dancer's timing, he swiped his blackened arm across the path of the harpoon, knocking it into the magma. "We need to close the distance," he said.

Kaya grimaced. "Actually, I don't think that's our problem."

The ship was only picking up speed, the fiery sails stoked into furnace-hot gusts. Two of the demons, the smaller ones, spread their wings and dragged themselves into the air with great, eager flaps. They didn't mean to just pull up alongside them.

"Look out!" shouted Kaya.

She dodged to one side of the path Tyvar had built them; he dodged to the other. Then that ramming edge along the prow smashed into it, scattering basalt and cinders into the air.

Kaya rolled to her feet in time to see the one with the mace hand swooping out of the sky toward her. He brought the weapon down in a colossal diving blow that smashed a dimple into the volcanic pack where Kaya had been standing a moment before.

Before he could pull his arm back, she stamped down on the flanges and phased it partially into the stone. He bellowed and grabbed for her, but she slipped free of his grasp like smoke, hop-stepping back to the harpoon still embedded in the rock.

It wasn't hard for her to wrench it free—phasing it here and there did the trick—but the weight of it nearly tipped her into the magma lake. While she struggled with both hands to heft the heavy iron pole, the demon beat his wings furiously, heaving and pulling at the volcanic rock enclosing his arm. With a little concentration, Kaya turned the harpoon entirely immaterial, then threw.

When it left her hand, it went from weightless, insubstantial, to suddenly every bit as heavy and lethal as before—and traveling at a much higher speed. It punched clean through the demon's hammered breastplate and out the other side. The demon thrashed in place for a moment, the mace on his arm still melded with the ground, before collapsing.

Kaya allowed herself a moment to exhale, then started forward. Planting one foot on the armor encasing the demon's back, she vaulted up onto the deck of the longship. On the other side, she could see Tyvar flanked. The demon with the horned helmet was chopping at him furiously with a pair of short cleavers lined with wicked, serrated teeth, and the big one she'd seen with his body half-encased in metal kept him penned in with great sweeps from a spiked hammer. Just one blow from that looked sufficient to take the elf's head off—but so far, Tyvar had managed to stay just ahead of every swing. His arms, she noticed, were no longer the rough black of basalt. Now they were a molten, glowing orange, as if he'd heated them in a forge. Each time he batted away a cleaver blow, embers scattered and winked out into the air.

He was quick, strong, and skilled, there was no doubt about that. But he couldn't keep this up forever.

She ducked under the flame sail, shielding her face from the heat with one hand, and took a running leap off the side, landing with a less-than-graceful flop across the big demon's back. He was twice her height, probably more than twice her weight, and barely leaned forward at the impact, but she managed to secure a hold around his neck.

With a thought, she wreathed her hand in that eerie light and straightened her fingers into a spear. *Quick jab through the heart. Flicker out of phase, and extract. Won't be comfortable, but it'll get the job done.*

As the demon groped awkwardly around his back trying to reach her, Kaya jabbed her hand just to the left of the spine, rematerializing for an instant—

And nearly blacked out from the pain. It was *burning* inside the demon, like sticking her hand in a furnace. She lost her grip on the demon's neck and tumbled off down onto the rough black stone beneath.

The demon shuddered, fell to one knee—then pushed himself to standing using the handle of that massive war hammer as a brace. He turned toward her, tiny red eyes smoldering with rage. From his mouth poured a thick black bile that bubbled and steamed. She'd hurt him, but not enough.

Her hand had only been material for a fraction of a second, yet she could still feel the pain, white-hot and absolute. But pain, like so many things, was a tool. A tool Kaya knew how to use. *Focus on it. Use it.* From somewhere deep inside her, Kaya felt an icy chill welling up.

The demon raised his hammer, the great muscles working to lift the massive thing, boiling blood still spilling from his mouth. That's when Kaya phased the rocky path beneath him into empty air.

The demon's wings shot out on reflex, trying to rebalance, to keep himself aloft. It might have worked, if not for the holes and tears that pocked their leathery surface, or the great hammer hanging above him. He started roaring the moment his legs sunk into the lava—he fell forward, dropping the hammer, clawing for purchase on the rough black stone still making up the part of the path Kaya stood on. With a sharp kick, she sent him flailing backwards into the molten rock and allowed the path to rematerialize over him.

Across the path, Tyvar's battle with the remaining demon raged on; with only one opponent, the elf was on the offensive. The brass knife affixed to his bracer had grown longer now, glowing orange with the same volcanic heat that covered his arms. With a snapping stroke that left heat shimmers through the air, he chopped straight through one of the demon's cleavers; his next slash passed through its

neck. She heard a sizzling sound, smelled something worse than burning hair, and then the demon's helmed head bounced once off the basalt and into the lava while the body sagged onto the path of black rock. The fight was done.

Kaya's hand still throbbed awfully despite the spell she'd used to fix the worst of it. She'd never had much of a knack for healing magic. It would likely be days before she had a full range of motion in it again.

"That was amazing!" said Tyvar.

"Yeah, yeah," said Kaya. "I saw what you—"

"That jarl was twice your size! Do you know how many humans, in all the sagas I've known, have slain a demon? Assuming you didn't talk things through with the other one, you bested *two*! And without a weapon! The skalds *must* hear about this. I'll tell them myself, when we're finished!"

"Uh, thanks," said Kaya, caught off guard. *So the kid can share glory.* "If we plan on doing this again, though, I'd prefer to be armed."

Something seemed to dawn on Tyvar, then. "Of course. Allow me."

He stooped over the massive hammer the demon jarl had dropped before going into the magma. Kaya was about to protest—*a bit heavy for me, not really my style*—when Tyvar pushed his fingers into the black iron of the hammerhead as if it were mud. From it, he pulled two fistfuls of metal: one he dropped to the path where it clinked dully against the rock.

The other nugget he held up and squinted at. "Terrible quality. But we can do something about that."

He pressed both hands around it and squeezed, the muscles along his arms and shoulders going taut. When his palms came apart, he was holding a small oval, rough in parts like the pit of a fruit. He knelt over and pushed it into the basalt, which took some doing. Afterwards, he did the same with the other nugget. Kaya watched, mystified, as he scooped broken, charcoal-colored earth into a little mound over each. "What are you doing?"

"Everything has the potential to grow," said Tyvar, straightening back up. "Trees, people—we expect it from them. But earth and stone, too, given time, and patience. Or, failing that, a bit of magic. I told you my abilities work differently in each realm I pass through. I figured in a place as lifeless as this, anything would be desperate to grow. Even metal. And I was right," he said, grinning.

She'd never heard of transmutation like this. "What about back in Gnottvold? What you did to those trolls?"

He waved his hand dismissively. "Easy. Torga trolls are creatures of the earth—they spend years at a time as little more than boulders, gathering moss. They're not far from stone as is. I only coaxed them a bit closer to that shape."

Then, before her eyes, something poked up out of the ground. A sprout—the same dark iron color that the oval had been, but curling, unfurling. Then another, from the other mound. Kaya watched as they grew taller and thicker, as they sprouted tendrils that wove together into braiding latticework. When the top folded over the rest, falling in a D-shaped curve, she realized what she was looking at: a hand-axe. Two, actually. Grown from the ground, like stalks of wheat.

Tyvar reached over and pulled them from the rock—twisting as he did so, as if snapping off a root. Then he handed them to her, handle first. "You like them fast and light. Is that right?"

Warily, she took one. The whole thing was made of the same material—no rust, no blood, no imperfections, just cold gray metal. The head of the axe, with those ornate knotwork patterns grown into it,

was a lighter color than the handle. Somehow the grip was rougher, in a way that felt like it wouldn't slip from her hands. She flipped it into the air, everything rotating around a point just below the axe head, and caught it again. Well-balanced, for something that popped out of the ground.

"Thanks," she said, tucking the axe and its sister into her belt.

Tyvar slapped her shoulder and grinned. "I'm certain you'll put them to good use. Now, we have a villain to catch. Shall we continue?"

"Actually," said Kaya, glancing back at where the demon longship was wedged into the black stone path. "I've got a better idea."



As vessels went, Kaya had much preferred Cosima's longship. On top of its uncanny ability to take one wherever they needed to go, there was no chance of impaling herself along the gunwale or setting her hair on fire adjusting the boom. Luckily, Tyvar seemed to have a bit more experience sailing than she did, and once the demon ship built up speed, it smashed through the plates of cooled magma floating on the lava's surface without so much as a judder.

The elf worked the sails while she kept watch from the prow. "There," she said, pointing ahead of them. Rising above an ash-gray plain was a vast, dark mountain. Where the peak should have been was a jagged, open cone that nearly brushed the roiling clouds above. At the top, Kaya could make out a strange light. It seemed to distort the air around it like shimmers of heat, occasionally sending a rippling ribbon of uncanny blue or green streaking into the sky. Where had she seen that light before? *Alrund*. In Kaldheim, that was the light of the gods. But it was the same light she'd seen at the fringes of the portal Tibalt had carved open.

Tyvar shifted the rudder, angling the ship toward the mountain. "That's the Bloodcrag! I never thought I'd actually get to see it."

"Great. Perfect. Bloodcrag." Briefly, she considered if it wasn't too late to turn this boat around. Nobody was paying her for Tibalt's head, after all.

But that horned bastard has so many enemies, I could probably find a buyer. Chandra, maybe.

They left the longship beached along the slagged shore of the lava lake. Scaling the mountain, at least, wouldn't be the hard part. Shaped into the rock were a set of ancient stairs. They were worn with age and slightly too large for Kaya or Tyvar to climb comfortably—carved into this place many millennia ago for the bloodthirsty inhabitants of Immersturm, not for elves or humans—but they were manageable.

Partway up, something caught her eye. Movement below them, on the magma lake. Kaya paused, her back to one of the huge and faintly warm steps. Across the surface of the lake, between the occasional flare of erupting lava, iron ships cut through the black, each one topped with a flickering curtain of flame in the shape of a sail. It was too far for her to make out any figures—from here, even the grim vessels looked like something she might find in a toy shop—but over the lash of wind this high up, she could just make out the steady beat of drums.

“By the Einir,” muttered Tyvar. “There must be dozens.”

“Hundreds,” said Kaya. “The ship we ran across must have been part of their vanguard. Scouts.”

“And that's the army.”

But why? All this—a legion of demons, a fleet of longships—just to stop them? She knew she was tough, and Tyvar wasn't half-bad for a budding planeswalker, but this seemed like overkill.

Unless—

Unless they weren't here for them at all.

“That sword,” said Kaya. “It opens portals! Rips holes in the space between realms!”

Tyvar stared uncomprehendingly at her. Kaya grabbed his shoulders and shook him. “Kid, he's going to start a Doomskar!”

“Correction,” came a voice from above them. “I already started it.”

A bolt of searing flame shot down from the switchback of stairs above them; Kaya threw herself to one side just in time to feel the heat lick against her face.

Grinning down at them from the ridge above was Tibalt. A curl of red, jittering flame wreathed one hand; in the other, he held that sword of shimmering, colorful glass.



Sword of the Realms | Art by: Lie Setiawan

“We’ve got to get that sword away from him,” said Kaya. Another ball of flame arced through the air, turning the rock molten where Tyvar had been standing a moment before.

She went one way, and Tyvar went the other. Between the winding stairway path, wedges of black rock jutted from the mountainside, evidence of tectonic shifts as savage as any denizen of the realm. Tyvar used them as cover, keeping low, climbing the slope in athletic leaps and bounds.

For Kaya, things weren’t so complicated. She beat a straight path for Tibalt, phasing through rock and fire and whatever else the devil threw her way; nimble as Tyvar was, she quickly pulled ahead of him.

Fifteen feet, then ten. Kaya slipped an axe from her belt and hurled it at Tibalt. It clipped his shoulder, sent him sprawling, and she drew the second axe. *Don’t let him get up.*

She pushed herself over the ridge and lunged for Tibalt, focused entirely on reaching him, on the subtle shifts in her footing to let her bring all her weight down with the blow. She saw, too late, the deep breath that was filling his chest, the puffing up of those red cheeks.

The smoke poured from his mouth in a great and sudden torrent, blanketing the oversized stairs in an instant. It rushed over Kaya in a wave, stinging her eyes, burning her throat. Blind, she swung anyway—but the axe only clanged off rock.

Kaya pulled her cowl over her mouth and nose with one hand, kept the axe leveled and ready with the other, but all she could see was the smoke. Throughout, little orange cinders danced with malice. It seemed to cling to her, to seek out gaps in the cloth she breathed through, to pry at her squinting eyelids. Anywhere it touched bare skin, it burned.

She did her best to shut out the pain and discomfort, to focus on her hearing. Where was Tibalt? Where was Tyvar?

It’s not too late to run.

The thought seemed to come from nowhere.

It’s done anyway. Tibalt already started the Doomskar. What are you still doing here?

Gradually, the burning across her skin, in her lungs and eyes, grew worse. An odd fatigue had settled into her limbs, too—the hand-axe she held out, once so light and balanced, seemed to drag her arm down now.

This plane's problems aren't your problems. You owe these people nothing. Go on—jump through the Blind Eternities. Get out of here. Save yourself. It's what you're best at, after all.

The thoughts rolled through her mind one after another, with Kaya powerless to stop them, and in spite of herself, she felt the impulse tugging at her, the magical energies building around her, preparing to carry her away.

It would be so easy. There's nothing for you here anymore but pain.

Something was wrong—beyond the burning smoke, beyond the unnatural exhaustion that now threatened to drag Kaya to her knees. There was a voice in her head. A voice that almost—but not quite—sounded like her own.

There was a movement in the swirling smoke to her right; she saw the sword first, those beautiful colors trapped in glass, arcing toward her. Tibalt, swinging to kill. “You couldn't just *leave*, could you?”

She tried to raise her axe to block the blow, but it was so heavy—her arm, so sluggish. Kaya knew already that it would arrive too late. On an animal instinct, Kaya squeezed her eyes shut.

There was a resounding clang. Not exactly the sound of metal biting into flesh. No pain, either. Funny.

Kaya opened her eyes. Between her and Tibalt stood Tyvar. He'd caught that shimmering god-light sword on the dagger fixed to his bracer. Tibalt was struggling to push through, arms shaking with the effort, and getting nowhere. “Who in all the hells are *you*?”

With a quick and practiced gesture, Tyvar knocked the sword from Tibalt's hands. “Tyvar Kell. Prince of the elves. Greatest hero in Kaldheim.”

The fog was starting to clear from Kaya's head now; she could *feel* where Tibalt had slipped into her mind, the way he had cloaked his presence in her own doubts and fears. The more she listened, the worse the fatigue and pain grew. It was almost artful, this magic—nothing like the clumsy, slapdash work she'd seen from him so far.

But then why had Tyvar been immune to it? He'd charged into the smoke, same as her. Why weren't his doubts, his insecurities, slowly sucking the life from him? Unless—unless he didn't have any?

By the ancients, she thought. *He's too young—too arrogant—too dumb to doubt himself. And thank all the gods of Kaldheim for that.*

In front of her, Tibalt scrambled back, red fire curling around one hand, but Tyvar grabbed him by his collar and flipped him over one shoulder, crashing the planeswalker into the edge of one stone stair. The breath went out of Tibalt in a hacking cough, and with it went the smoke and the fire, dwindling to nothing around them. Tyvar pressed his brass blade to Tibalt's neck. “Now, fiend, you will tell us what you've done.”

At that, Tibalt managed a grin. “Go see for yourself,” he croaked.

Kaya felt the energy gathering around him, the magic a sharp, acrid taste in the air. She tried to shout, but then there was the sound of a fire catching on dry wood, and the back of Tibalt's eyes lit orange. Like burning paper, his body dissolved into a mass of orange cinders, and Tyvar stumbled back.

“He,” sputtered the elf. “He—”

“Planeswalked. Yeah,” said Kaya, pushing herself off the ground. “Tyvar—thanks. For helping me there.”

"Of course," he said, recovering. "But what if he returns?"

"He can't. Not for a while, anyway, and if he does, he'll be no threat to us. It takes a lot of magic to jump planes. He'll need a while to recharge."

"Ah," said Tyvar. "So we've won? It's over?"

Kaya glanced up toward the peak of the mountain, where those strange lights continued to coruscate and ripple across the ash-clouded sky. "No. I don't think it is."

On any other day, maybe the sight of a vast well of blood resting in the cone of the mountain below them might have been worth a moment's regard. But from the peak of the Bloodcrag, they had a clear view of the tear in the sky. It stretched, end to end, from where they stood to the middle of the lake of magma they had crossed; Kaya didn't know whether the heavy clouds of ash had blocked their view or whether it was new, a fresh wound made during their initial ascent. Along the edges of the tear, spilling out and covering the sky, radiated that shifting, multicolored light.

"By all the realms," muttered Tyvar.

Inside, Kaya could see a shifting, kaleidoscopic tableau of landscapes: craggy, towering mountains, fortresses of ice, plains of tall yellow grass. It felt as though she was seeing into the whole of the Multiverse, all the planes rent open in one utterly wrong stroke.

"Any chance you know how to undo that? Maybe with the sword?" she said. They'd brought it up with them, tucked into Tyvar's belt.

He shook his head. "My talents *do* have their limits, you know."

Despite everything—the iron reek of blood, the tear in the sky—that forced a laugh from Kaya. It died in her throat, though, when she saw the first figures rising from the fiery lake far below them. With each beat of their leathery wings, they rose higher into the air, bearing swords and spears, halberds and hammers, the weight of the weapons and armor dragging at them but not keeping them from their steady, dreadful progress. There must have been thousands of them, all headed for that hole in the sky. Their invitation to pillage, to burn, to destroy not just one world but all the worlds this plane had to offer. At their center, rising from a ship with two vast masts of fire, was a demon that dwarfed all the others. In one hand he dragged a great double-bladed axe; he seemed to be beating his wings with manic fury, bowling past others in his need for escape. She knew his name, even before Tyvar whispered it, dumbstruck. She had heard it spoken enough times during her time with the Omenseekers: Varragoth.



Varragoth, Bloodsky Sire | Art by: Ian Miller

Kaya turned to Tyvar, who was still staring at the unholy flock rising before them. “Tyvar, we have to go. This plane is about to go to pieces.”

He didn’t seem to hear her. “We need to stop them. We need to warn whoever’s on the other side!”

“Tyvar,” she said, gently. “It’s over. You’re a great warrior, don’t get me wrong, but the greatest warrior in history couldn’t change what’s about to happen.” Already, she could see demons crossing into the gap, their great wingbeats bringing them to new prey. “We tried. Now all we can do is stay alive. Get to the next plane, try to do better—”

She tried to put a hand on his back, but he wrenched away from her. “So this is what your kind does—disappear as soon as the world pitches a direction you don’t care for. Run as soon as things get hard. You and that Tibalt aren’t so different in the end.”

The words hit her harder than she expected. By the time she’d started shaping together a reply—something about not being so hardheaded, something about going to get yourself killed—Tyvar had already opened an Omenpath. He turned to her. “If this is what it means to be a planeswalker, I want no part in it.”

With that, he stepped through the doorway.

The energy Kaya had been gathering to planeswalk still hung in the air around her, a nameless pressure lacking a valve. She could still go. She *should* still go. It was the smart choice. It was her code.

But she couldn’t help thinking about those voices in her head. How she’d been hearing them, in one way or another, since long before she’d met Tibalt or Tyvar.

Kaya swore, took a deep breath, and stepped in after him.