

TRIPPING MEMORIES

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Walking out of Plaza's main doors was a relief, even if what greeted me was a suffocating humidity. This had been my biggest commission yet. Between my customized cards and proxy commissions, word had finally gotten around and orders were beginning to pick up. I had created the habit, whenever I went to Plaza, of walking directly to the gaming tables, where Iván greeted me, holding out a hand expectantly. He usually got a kick out of inspecting the quality of my *Magic the Gathering* proxies.

This time he took longer looking at my cards than previous occasions. He simply couldn't stop himself from nitpicking.

"Which *commission* is this, Paula?" he asked.

"If you must know, *presentao'*, it's for Felipe's unfinished commander deck," I answered, taking the proxy card from his hand. "Can you drop this 'inspector' act, *por favor?* It ruins the mood and gets on my nerves." I sighed, walking towards my table.

However, I couldn't help but to feel that he was right. Something felt off from that proxy card, I just hadn't been able to put my finger on it.

"It's just this 'business' of yours has always struck me as useless. It can't be used in anything official anyways," he said, sitting with his binder full of cards.

"Not everyone plays to compete, you weirdo," I smacked Iván's head with my sketchbook as I continued, "And it's none of your *business* anyway."

I would have to go home and do research on that card.

“Last time you brought that odd-looking human-lizard blue card, it didn’t have the correct color armor or type.” His comment looped in my head.

“Blue?” I asked, turning. “It was clearly green.” I responded rather confused but confident in my memory.

I wouldn't have thought anything weird of it if Iván hadn't asked around the other tables where people played all sorts of card games. The responses we got were rather mixed. Some said it was a blue human-lizard, others said green, while others even said it was a lizard warrior instead. I found their comments confusing. Yet it wasn't the first time something like this had happened. In fact, it almost feels as if it's been going on since I was a kid.

“Pero, mami, where is it?” I remember mami showing me a piece of paper. “It’s right there, mija,” but that wasn’t my drawing at all.

“Mami, I drew un caballito rosita,” I cried harder.

“Pero si se parece a un caballito, mira.” When she handed me the picture I saw a green monster with four paws. I kept crying for a few minutes after that, not knowing where mi caballito was. “I’m telling you that’s not it! I didn’t draw that!” I remember jumping up and down in frustration.

“Mi amor, don’t get mad. You know what? Maybe if we look around—” Papi suddenly walked in the room, interrupting mami.

“This again? Mamita, are you sure you’re not wishing you had drawn el caballito instead?” Dad said as he knelt down to look at me.

“No! I drew a caballito! I’m not lying!” I shouted.

“Now, no need to get so mad, mamita.” Mom put her hand on my head, “I’ll get more paper and we can draw one together.”

I remember them walking away, but I could still hear them talking softly among themselves. “Otra vez con lo mismo,” I heard him whisper to Mami.

“Es solo una niña, it’ll go away cuando esté grande.” Mami muttered back.

“I’m sure you’re right,” he said, sitting down on the couch to watch the news.

I felt like that little girl again when Iván didn’t believe me.

“*Mijo*, I’m pretty sure I know my work well enough to remember what my commissions are,” I told him.

“YOU remember it a certain way,” Iván stood up, pointing at me.

“The way it was done, you mean. Where’s your boyfriend when you need him? He has the card, he’d know. Guess he’ll hear about it the next time he comes to play.” I sighed. Iván had a troubled expression. He sat back on his chair, his head tilting upwards.

“You don’t think... No, that’s impossible.”

“What are you on about? Think what?” I asked, nearing him.

“It’s nothing. Forget about it. Doesn’t change anything.” He looked me in the eye. “Are you sure you remember right? It’s not the first time one of your cards caught my attention for deviating from the MTG rules. Maybe that’s why everyone’s obsessed with your proxies.” I’d hate to admit it but he’s right. This isn’t the first time something like this has happened with my work. Iván has been the only one to point out that something is going on. Even if I showed my partner, Marina, my cards, she seemed to be clueless about changes happening to them.

First it was small details, like the card type, but now it’s escalating to the artwork itself. What’s next? Would everyone seem to recall this commission being a token rather than a permanent creature card? I had been meaning to expand to other types of cards, but if these mistakes keep happening, could I get in trouble? Regardless, what is going on?

“*De todos modos*, I’d be more careful about selling things like that, especially around tournament season.” he said.

Sometimes, it felt like Iván wanted to inspect my thoughts themselves.

“Fine. I really need to be on my way and work on today’s commissions. I’ll see you tomorrow, hopefully you won’t be so picky,” I stepped out of the store and into the buzzing halls of Plaza.

Iván walked out shortly after me, and told me to wait up for a moment.

“At first I thought I was crazy, but this keeps happening,” he told me, any playfulness in his tone gone. “Maybe stay on the lookout.”

“*Lo que tú digas, Iván.*” I said, turning to leave this place.

“Take it with a grain of salt,” he shrugged. “You wouldn’t want to trip on a memory that never was.” With that, he walked back to his table.

He said he didn’t mean to startle me, but how could something like that not? I needed to clear my head. I started walking around, looking at the store windows. *You wouldn’t want to trip on a memory that never was.* Those words resonated in my head while I looked.

I liked to think that coming to the mall almost everyday to play Magic would at least make me memorize the clothing displays, but there was always something new. Though, I doubted that they would change mannequins that much.

Walking out of Plaza’s main doors was a relief, even if what greeted me was a suffocating humidity. I felt like I really understood what he said. Is it weird that another person is noticing these things as well? I had always thought it was just me, maybe it’s something bigger than I thought... The most unsettling thing, though, was that this morning Iván had a scar on his chin, pale and indented, like it had had stitches. It hadn’t been there yesterday. It hadn’t been there last week, when we met up with Marina and Felipe to play Commander. I’d have to ask him about it tomorrow.

It felt like I had walked for a few minutes, and I still could not find my car. I was pretty sure I parked it in Section 3B, but none of these cars are mine. *Huh?* Why is there a black Mercedes in my exact parking spot? I owned a *chustrito* of a car. Two things jumbled in one day that I know of. What’s going on? I reached in my pockets to get my keys yet, instead of feeling my usual clunky keychain, a little black box with a Mercedes logo came out. Is my memory failing or is it *spreading*? I pressed the unlock button on el *bíper* and the headlights on the Mercedes flashed. This was weird.



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