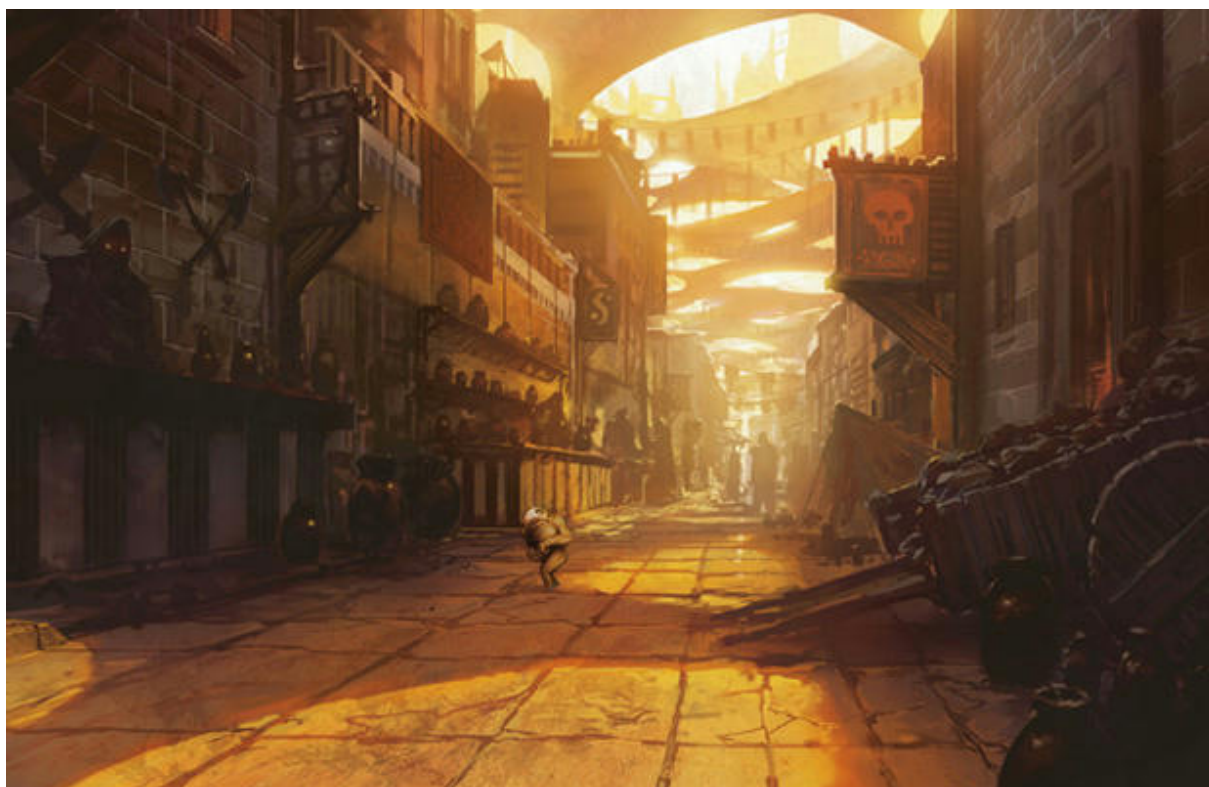


Fblthp

Matt Tabak

From set *Gatecrash*

The noise that escaped Fblthp's lips could best be described as a whimper. He didn't speak any language the citizens of Ravnica were familiar with, but that agonized sound of desperation was instantly recognizable. Unfortunately, the alley Fblthp found himself in was seemingly deserted, except for who caused the whimper in the first place.



Weathered fists seized the tiny homunculus by the arms and hoisted him up until he was face-to-eye with a wiry human. Pierced and severe, the human's face twisted in a sneer. Fblthp fell silent and instinctively started quivering. It was the most scared he'd ever been. It was also the highest he'd ever been off the ground. A laugh, like the scraping of boots on cobblestone, emerged from his captor. Tucking Fblthp under his arm as a courier would a missive, the human slinked off toward a neighborhood known to be controlled by the Cult of Rakdos. This wasn't how this was supposed to go.

Fblthp started whimpering again.

Fblthp was immensely grateful his service to the Azorius Senate rarely required him to leave the safety and relative simplicity of the Magisters' Garden. His duties were also relatively simple: remove detritus from the wide pedestrian walkways that joined the various fountains and canals, polish the lower plaques adorning the statues of notable lawmakers, and alert the security officers of anything troubling. As ordinances forbade anything troubling on the grounds, the last duty had seldom been required.

Like many in service to the senate, Fblthp enjoyed basic protections and allowances appropriate to his station as provided by law. In fact, he'd grown quite accustomed to the way he was treated by his masters—that is, to being ignored. He was given food and an unassuming home of sorts. Working with the flora in the garden sometimes aggravated his allergies, so the senate also provided a solution to prevent his eye from itching too badly. It was a safe, wonderful existence.

It was unusual for members of other guilds to visit the Magisters' Garden, and the appearance of outsiders usually scared Fblthp. The leaf-covered druids of the Selesnya weren't too bad, although they did tend to pet him while uttering indecipherable prayers. Simic researchers sometimes mumbled among themselves about cross-breeding Fblthp with a bat or a sea anemone. At that point, Fblthp usually remembered some forgotten duty on the other side of the garden and skittered away.

One day, as Fblthp walked the western edge of the garden, scooping up discarded scraps of food and other trash, he was approached by a human woman. He recognized the imposing figure by her attire—sigiled armor and cobalt trappings. She was an arrester. This was odd, indeed. Most arresters who visited the garden disregarded him completely, often accidentally kicking him if he were in their path. She leaned down and peered sternly into Fblthp's eye.



"You are Thbltpth?" she asked, the last word bringing a torrent of spittle upon the homunculus's face. Fblthp blinked twice and bobbed his head slightly.

"I am Arrester Parisha. I serve the Ninth Precinct. Pursuant to Provision IV.126.3 of Isperia's Edict, I require your assistance. Please come with me."

She offered her hand. Fblthp whimpered.

Fblthp had never been inside any of the three majestic columns that comprised New Prahv. They were impossibly tall, gleaming, and immaculate. Without a word, he was deposited in a stark subchamber on the first floor by a slender vedalken male. Blinking slowly, Fblthp nervously absorbed his new surroundings; the barren walls and plain furniture that was too high up to be helpful. So he stood and waited.



Eventually, Parisha opened the wooden door and entered. Determined and efficient, but not unkind, she sat and placed two scrolls on the desk. She looked expectantly at Fblthp and glanced at the opposing chair. Realizing the impossibility of her silent request, she rose and lifted Fblthp into the chair. It was the highest he'd ever been off the ground.

"This," Parisha proclaimed as she unfurled the first scroll, "is Vadax Gor. For months now, he's associated himself with a certain Rakdos establishment. A 'diversion club,' as I believe it is known." Parisha spat out the phrase distastefully. Fblthp shivered slightly at the image of the strange human. His face was ravaged with scars, piercings, and tattoos. Tattered scraps that barely qualified as clothing hung lazily from his malnourished frame. Fblthp had never encountered anything like him, and he earnestly wished not to.

"Vadax Gor enjoys all manner of depravity," Parisha continued, "but lately his tastes have grown perversely specialized. He is no longer satisfied to keep his foolishness contained to the cult. He is suspected in the disappearance of two of our citizens. With your assistance, there won't be a third. Investigators have yet to find direct evidence of Gor's involvement in the kidnappings. We need to catch him in the act."

Fblthp's eye grew wide, even for him. He briefly wondered if he could make it to the door before Parisha could catch him, but he knew this was foolish. He wouldn't be allowed to return to his duties if he disobeyed an arrester. Besides, he was still very high up on that chair. He wasn't sure he could jump down without hurting himself. Lacking other options, Fblthp whimpered softly.

“The previous two abductions have taken place within two blocks of this leatherworking shop,” Parishia said, pointing at the map. “We believe the owner of that shop is somehow involved. Perhaps he is signaling Gor when a likely target appears. You are to travel to his shop to deliver these tax forms. They will need to be filled out immediately and in triplicate. If our suspicions are correct, Gor will make his move after you depart.”

If she had left it at that, Fblthp would surely have ran, beloved garden duties or no. But her eyes softened momentarily and she continued. “Do not fear, little one. My agents and I will be stationed throughout the area. We will never lose sight of you. You will be in no danger. Gor will not lay a hand on you. You’ll be back in the Magisters’ Garden in a few days. Isperia’s Edict does not permit me to fail you.” She smiled slightly.

Fblthp wasn’t sure if he believed this, but he stopped quivering and nodded slowly.

Fblthp had always hated crowds. He scooted down the busy Ravnican thoroughfare, his eye darting quickly from passerby to passerby. No one was particularly paying him much attention, which he liked. No one was particularly making any effort to step around him, either. He was nearly kicked half a dozen times before he made it to his destination.



Totally Lost | Art by David Palumbo

The leatherworker and proprietor was human, but only technically. Burly as an ogre and twice as ugly, he towered over Fblthp and grunted. Fblthp meekly presented his satchel. The man grunted again and opened it. Bits of food fell out of his scraggly beard as he began to read—an impressive feat, all things considered. A thunderous noise rumbled out of the man as he went to a back storeroom. Fblthp blinked and eyed the food on the floor suspiciously.

After a time, the owner emerged and thrust the completed forms in Fblthp's direction. Fblthp bowed and turned to leave. The man rumbled again, but Fblthp wasn't sure why. As instructed, he turned toward the alleys behind the shop. Parisha, masquerading as a shopper at a nearby fruit market, briefly made eye contact with the homunculus as he disappeared into the alley. That made him feel better.

Fblthp walked down the alley, slowly but with growing confidence. He imagined Parisha and her comrades would be making arrests any minute now, and he could go back to the garden. He thought of the gently flowing waters of the garden's canals when a terrible crashing sound rang out behind him. He whipped around, expecting to see Parisha or one of the arresters. Instead, the dreadful shape of Vadax Gor emerged from the shadows. Fblthp dropped his satchel and whimpered.

Gor's confidence and speed both grew as he left the scene of the crime behind him. Fblthp closed his eye, not wanting to see the fate that awaited him. He felt Gor turn left at an intersection. Then right. And then, without warning, Gor stopped. Fblthp opened his eye slightly at the jolt. He squirmed around to get a look at Gor, now frozen. He opened his eye a little wider, not comprehending what was going on.



Parisha approached them from behind at a full sprint. "Vadax Gor," she shouted between heavy breaths, "you are under arrest." As she caught up to them, she dislodged Fblthp from the detainee's grip. Fblthp noticed a blue glow surrounding Gor, who was still immobile.

"My apologies, little one," Parisha murmured. "That leatherworker must've suspected something and attacked one of my agents before we could begin our pursuit. It was a minor delay, but you were in no danger." They were quickly joined by several other arresters, who dragged the deadweight known as Vadax Gor back through the alley toward the square.

Fblthp stood in an antechamber on the sixth floor of the Lyev Column. It was the highest he'd ever been off the ground. Parisha stood beside him. Silently, she turned, bent slightly at the waist, and nodded to him. A marble door Fblthp hadn't realized was there swung out from unseen hinges, and a squat, robed official strode into the room.

Parisha saluted. "Senator," she greeted him reverently. Fblthp blinked.

"Arrester. Congratulations on a successful mission. This is the one you mentioned in your report?" He peered down at a piece of parchment. "Cthillcip?"

"Yes, Senator."

"Very well." The elder bureaucrat turned his gaze onto the foot-high homunculus. "Pursuant to Provision III.875.2b of Isperia's Edict, please accept my thanks on behalf of the senate and the lawful people of Ravnica. Although monetary reward is disallowed, your descendants may petition the senate to create a tablet recounting your honorable deeds upon your death." He turned and left the room.

Parisha motioned to the room's southern exit. "Come, let us return you to your duties." Fblthp practically bounced to the door, eager to see the Garden again.

"At least, until next time."

Fblthp whimpered.